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(Original Signature of Member)

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. _____

To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and to improve the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of the Department.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

M____. _____ introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on _____

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and to improve the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of the Department.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Improving VA Inclu-
5 sion, Diversity, Equity and Access Act of 2022” or the
6 “IDEA Act of 2022”.

1 **SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF DIVERSITY**
2 **AND INCLUSION.**

3 Chapter 3 of title 38, United States Code, is amended
4 by adding at the end the following new section (and con-
5 forming the table of sections at the beginning of such
6 chapter accordingly):

7 **“§ 324. Office of Diversity and Inclusion**

8 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is in the Department
9 an Office of Diversity and Inclusion (in this section re-
10 ferred to as the ‘Office’).

11 “(b) CHIEF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OFFICER.—

12 (1) The head of the Office is the Chief Diversity and In-
13 clusion Officer (in this section referred to as the ‘Chief’).

14 “(2) The Chief may not concurrently serve as the Di-
15 rector of the Office of Employment Discrimination Com-
16 plaint Adjudication or the Assistant Secretary or Deputy
17 Assistant Secretary for complaint resolution management
18 described in section 516(b) of this title.

19 “(3) The Chief reports directly to the Secretary.

20 “(c) DUTIES.—The Chief shall carry out the fol-
21 lowing duties:

22 “(1) Support, coordinate, and facilitate the ef-
23 forts of the Department to conduct research, evalua-
24 tion activities, and other evidence-building activities
25 in accordance with subchapter II of chapter 3 of

1 title 5 to advance the goals outlined in the plan de-
2 veloped under subsection (d).

3 “(2) Identify best practices for broadening in-
4 clusion, diversity, equity, and access for—

5 “(A) the hiring and advancement of em-
6 ployees of the Department; and

7 “(B) providing services and benefits to
8 beneficiaries of programs administered by the
9 Secretary, including pursuant to subsections (e)
10 and (f).

11 “(d) QUINQUENNIAL STRATEGIC PLAN.—(1) Not
12 later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of
13 this section, and every five years thereafter, the Secretary
14 shall develop a plan to address diversity, equity, inclusion,
15 and accessibility for employees of the Department and
16 beneficiaries of programs administered by the Secretary.

17 “(2) Each plan developed under paragraph (1) shall
18 include—

19 “(A) long-term goals, strategic objectives, per-
20 formance goals, priorities, strategic human capital
21 planning, and budget planning to improve diversity;
22 and

23 “(B) improvements to ensure equitable, inclu-
24 sive, and accessible programs and operations of the
25 Department.

1 “(3) The Secretary shall develop each plan under
2 paragraph (1) in consultation with the advisory commit-
3 tees, commissions, and boards of the Department, vet-
4 erans service organizations, labor organizations, advisory
5 groups, and other experts that the Secretary determines
6 appropriate.

7 “(4) Not later than one year after developing each
8 plan under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall submit the
9 plan to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House
10 of Representatives and the Senate and make the plan pub-
11 licly available.

12 “(e) INCREASED USE OF PROGRAMS.—The Chief
13 shall develop a plan to increase the use by underserved
14 communities of the programs administered by the Sec-
15 retary. The plan shall include the following:

16 “(1) Analyzing data and conducting studies to
17 better serve beneficiaries of programs administered
18 by the Secretary in underserved communities, in-
19 cluding with respect to who participates in such pro-
20 grams administered by the Veterans Health Admin-
21 istration and the Veterans Benefits Administration.

22 “(2) Identifying disparities in tools and re-
23 sources that the Department provides that affect
24 such beneficiaries in underserved communities, in-

1 including technological, language, and transportation
2 related barriers.

3 “(3) Collaborating with strategic partners, in-
4 cluding private industry and non-profit organiza-
5 tions, to better communicate the programs provided
6 by the Department to underserved communities.

7 “(4) Improving the communications strategy of
8 the Department, including with respect to using
9 non-traditional access points with minority-serving
10 institutions, faith-based organizations, and other in-
11 stitutions.

12 “(5) Reviewing the grant-making partnerships,
13 training opportunities, and contract awards by the
14 Department for underserved communities.

15 “(f) TRAINING AND COUNSELING.—The Chief
16 shall—

17 “(1) develop mandatory training for employees
18 of the Department on providing care and service to
19 beneficiaries of programs administered by the Sec-
20 retary who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual,
21 transgender, or queer (commonly referred to as
22 ‘LGBTQ’) to enhance the customer experience and
23 promote equitable access to such programs; and

1 “(2) expand the employee assistance program of
2 the Department to include counseling services on
3 discrimination-based trauma.

4 “(g) ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND BOARDS.—The
5 Chief shall—

6 “(1) collect and analyze demographic data re-
7 garding the membership of advisory committees,
8 commissions, and boards of the Department; and

9 “(2) develop a plan to increase diversity, equity,
10 inclusion, and accessibility of the members of such
11 advisory committees, commissions, and boards.

12 “(h) PRIVACY PROTECTIONS.—The Chief shall col-
13 lect, analyze, and share data under this section in a man-
14 ner that protects the privacy and confidentiality of individ-
15 uals in accordance with section 552a of title 5, United
16 States Code (commonly known as the ‘Privacy Act of
17 1974’) and other relevant provisions of law. The Chief
18 shall use appropriate statistical standards with respect to
19 such data.

20 “(i) CLARIFICATION OF ROLE.—The Office—

21 “(1) is a separate element of the Department
22 from the Office of Employment Discrimination Com-
23 plaint Adjudication established by section 319 of
24 this title and the Office of Resolution Management,

1 Diversity and Inclusion, or successor office, estab-
2 lished pursuant to section 516; and

3 “(2) may not be a part of the employment dis-
4 crimination complaint resolution system established
5 under such section.

6 “(j) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

7 “(1) The term ‘accessibility’ means the design,
8 construction, development, and maintenance of fa-
9 cilities, information and communication technology,
10 programs, and services in a manner that ensures all
11 individuals, including individuals with disabilities,
12 can fully and independently use the facilities, tech-
13 nology, programs, and services.

14 “(2) The term ‘diversity’ means the practice of
15 including the different communities, identities, races,
16 ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and be-
17 liefs of the United States, including underserved
18 communities.

19 “(3) The term ‘equity’ means the consistent
20 and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of
21 all individuals, including individuals who belong to
22 underserved communities that have been denied such
23 treatment.

1 “(4) The term ‘inclusion’ means the recogni-
2 tion, appreciation, and use of the talents and skills
3 of employees of all backgrounds.

4 “(5) The term ‘underserved communities’
5 means populations sharing a particular char-
6 acteristic, unique challenges, and geographic commu-
7 nities, who have been systemically and institutionally
8 denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of
9 economic, social, and civic life.”.