

I would like to introduce H.R. 7765, the VA Security Screening Pilot Program Act. This legislation directs the Secretary to select one of its networks (VISN) to carry out a pilot program to use new weapon screening technology at the primary entrance of each VA medical center no later than a year after the legislation's enactment.

For too long, outdated security equipment has placed unnecessary strain on police working at VA medical facilities nationwide, who often already face staffing shortages and daily challenges. The logistical difficulties that accompany outdated security tech force some facilities not to use any screening at their entrances. This combination of antiquated equipment and logistical difficulty puts employees and veterans alike at increased risk, should an emergency situation occur.

And we know that, all too often, these situations do occur. Violent crime has more than doubled on VA medical center campuses in the last few years, and the tragic occurrence of veteran suicide has persisted over the same period of time. When I think about how much our nation's veterans have done for the United States, and then I see the conditions they endure well after their service has concluded, it's clear to me that there's much more to be done. This hits me personally, as a veteran, myself.

This bill will make sure that the VA has the resources it needs to protect its facilities from bad actors by allowing them to test security tech, refining their approach with feedback from security personnel and veterans alike, to reach an informed decision on what measures would be most effective in securing their campuses.

Our veterans gave their best to this country. This country owes every single veteran its very best in return. It is unacceptable that instances of violent crime have increased so drastically in VA facilities, and tragic that suicide on VA campuses is as common as it is. Congress has a long way to go in doing right by the men and women who have served our country in uniform—this bill is a necessary step in the right direction.