117TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION  
H. R. 8215

To improve cybersecurity practices and improve digital literacy among veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
JUNE 23, 2022  
Ms. SLOTKIN introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs

A BILL

To improve cybersecurity practices and improve digital literacy among veterans, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Online Information and Cybersecurity Empowerment Act of 2022” or the “VOICE Act of 2022”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

(1) Researchers have documented persistent, pervasive, and coordinated online targeting of mem-
bers of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their families by foreign adversaries seeking to undermine United States democracy in part because of public trust placed in these communities. Government agencies and researchers have also documented the targeting of veterans by fraudsters, especially online scammers, seeking to steal their government benefits.

(2) According to the Federal Trade Commission, fraud costs veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and their families $267,000,000 in 2021. This was a 162-percent increase from 2020 and the median loss for these scam victims was $600, 20 percent higher than for the median loss for the general public. According to a 2017 survey conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) veterans are twice as likely to unknowingly participate in a scam compared to the general population and an estimated 16 percent of veterans report having losing some money to fraud, while 78 percent report encountering scams that have explicitly designed to exploit their military service.

(3) At the same time, adversaries from Russia, China, and Iran are using information warfare to influence democracies across the world, and extremist
organizations often use digital communications to recruit members. Influence campaigns from foreign adversaries reached tens of millions of voters during the 2016 and 2018 elections with racially and divisively targeted messages. The United States can fight these influences by ensuring that citizens of the United States possess the necessary skills to discern disinformation and misinformation and protect themselves from foreign influence campaigns.

(4) The Select Committee on Intelligence of the Senate found in its investigation of the interference in the 2016 election that social media posts by the Internet Research Agency (IRA) of Russia reached tens of millions of voters in 2016 and were meant to pit the people of the United States against one another and sow discord. Volume II of the Committee’s investigation found that the Internet Research Agency’s Instagram account with the second largest reach used the handle “@american.veterans” and was “aimed at patriotic, conservative audiences, collected 215,680 followers, and generated nearly 18.5 million engagements.”.

(5) A 2019 investigative report by the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) titled “An Investigation into Foreign Entities who are Targeting Troops and
Veterans Online”, found that the Internet Research Agency targeted veterans and the followers of several congressionally chartered veterans service organizations with at least 113 advertisements during and following the 2016 election and that “this represents a fraction of the Russian activity that targeted this community with divisive propaganda.”. The report also found that foreign actors have been impersonating veterans through social-media accounts and interacting with veterans and veterans groups on social media to spread propaganda and disinformation. To counter these acts, Vietnam Veterans of America recommended that the Department of Veterans Affairs “immediately develop plans to make the cyber-hygiene of veterans an urgent priority within the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA must educate and train veterans on personal cybersecurity: how to mitigate vulnerabilities, vigilantly maintain safe practices, and recognize threats, including how to identify instances of online manipulation.”.

(6) The Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a bicameral and bipartisan commission, established by section 1652 of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (Pub-
lic Law 115–232), concluded in its finished report that the “U.S. government should promote digital literacy, civics education, and public awareness to build societal resilience to foreign, malign cyber-enabled information operations and that the U.S. government must ensure that individual Americans have both the digital literacy tools and the civics education they need to secure their networks and their democracy from cyber-enabled information operations.”. The report recommended that Congress authorize grant programs to do this.

SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

It is the sense of Congress that, given the threat foreign influence campaigns pose for United States democracy, the effect of online scams on veterans and their families, and the findings and recommendations of Congress, Federal agencies, and experts, Congress should immediately act to pass legislative measures to increase digital and media literacy, as well as cybersecurity best practices among veterans of the United States.

SEC. 4. VETERANS CYBERSECURITY AND DIGITAL LITERACY GRANT PROGRAM.

(a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—The Secretary shall establish a program to promote digital citizenship and media literacy, through which the Secretary shall award grants
to eligible entities to enable those eligible entities to carry
out the activities described in subsection (c).

(b) APPLICATION.—An eligible entity seeking a grant
under the program required by subsection (a) shall submit
to the Secretary an application therefor at such time, in
such manner, and containing such information as the Sec-
retary may require, including, at a minimum the following:

(1) A description of the activities the eligible
entity intends to carry out with the grant funds.

(2) An estimate of the costs associated with
such activities.

(3) Such other information and assurances as
the Secretary may require.

(e) ACTIVITIES.—An eligible entity shall use the
amount of a grant awarded under the program required
by subsection (a) to carry out one or more of the following
activities to promote cybersecurity best practices and in-
crease digital and media literacy among veterans:

(1) Develop competencies in cybersecurity best
practices.

(2) Develop media literacy and digital citizen-
ship competencies by promoting veterans’—
(A) research and information fluency;
(B) critical thinking and problem solving
skills;
(C) technology operations and concepts;

(D) information and technological literacy;

(E) concepts of media and digital representation and stereotyping;

(F) understanding of explicit and implicit media and digital messages;

(G) understanding of values and points of view that are included and excluded in media and digital content;

(H) understanding of how media and digital content may influence ideas and behaviors;

(I) understanding of the importance of obtaining information from multiple media sources and evaluating sources for quality;

(J) understanding how information on digital platforms can be altered through algorithms, editing, and augmented reality;

(K) ability to create media and digital content in civically and socially responsible ways; and

(L) understanding of influence campaigns conducted by foreign adversaries and the tactics employed by foreign adversaries for conducting influence campaigns.

(d) Reporting.—
(1) **REPORTS BY GRANT RECIPIENTS.**—Each recipient of a grant under the program required by subsection (a) shall, not later than one year after the date on which the recipient first receives funds pursuant to the grant, submit to the Secretary a report describing the activities the recipient carried out using grant funds and the effectiveness of those activities.

(2) **REPORT BY THE SECRETARY.**—Not later than 90 days after the date on which the Secretary receives the last report the Secretary expects to receive under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report describing the activities carried out under this section and the effectiveness of those activities.

(e) **SENSE OF CONGRESS.**—It is the sense of Congress that the Secretary should—

(1) establish and maintain a list of eligible entities that receive a grant under the program required by subsection (a), and individuals designated by those eligible entities as participating individuals; and

(2) make that list available to those eligible entities and participating individuals in order to promote communication and further exchange of information.
mation regarding sound digital citizenship and
media literacy practices among recipients of grants
under the program required by subsection (a).

(f) Authorization of Appropriations.—There is
authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
$20,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2023, 2025, and
2027.

(g) Definitions.—In this section:

(1) Cybersecurity best practices.—The
term “cybersecurity best practices” means practices
and steps that users of computers and other internet
connected devices take to maintain and improve on-
line security, maintain the proper functioning of
computers devices, and protect computers and de-
vices from cyberattacks and unauthorized use.

(2) Digital citizenship.—The term “digital
citizenship” means the ability to—

(A) safely, responsibly, and ethically use
communication technologies and digital inform-
ation technology tools and platforms;

(B) create and share media content using
principles of social and civic responsibility and
with awareness of the legal and ethical issues
involved; and
(C) participate in the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of life related to technology, communications, and the digital world by consuming and creating digital content, including media.

(3) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible entity” means—

(A) a civil society organization, including community groups, nongovernmental organizations, nonprofit organization, labor organizations, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, professional associations, and foundations; and

(B) congressionally chartered veterans service organizations.

(4) MEDIA LITERACY.—The term “media literacy” means the ability to—

(A) access relevant and accurate information through media in a variety of forms;

(B) critically analyze media content and the influences of different forms of media;

(C) evaluate the comprehensiveness, relevance, credibility, authority, and accuracy of information;
(D) make educated decisions based on information obtained from media and digital sources;

(E) operate various forms of technology and digital tools; and

(F) reflect on how the use of media and technology may affect private and public life.

(5) SECRETARY.—The term ‘‘Secretary’’ means the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.