H. R. ____

To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs an Office of Food Insecurity, and for other purposes.

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 an Office of Food Insecurity, and for other purposes.

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. ESTABLISHMENT OF DEPARTMENT OF VET-
4 ERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE OF FOOD INSECU-
5 RITY.

6 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 3 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
7 lowing new section:
§ 324. Office of Food Insecurity

(a) Establishment.—There is in the Department an office to be known as the ‘Office of Food Insecurity’. There is at the head of the Office a Director, who shall be a career appointee in the Senior Executive Service.

(b) Responsibilities.—(1) The Director of the Office of Food Insecurity shall carry out the following responsibilities:

(A) To provide information to veterans concerning the availability of, and eligibility requirements for Federal nutrition assistance programs.

(B) To collaborate with other program offices of the Department, including the Homeless Programs Office, to develop and implement policies and procedures to identify and treat veterans at-risk or experiencing food insecurity.

(C) To collaborate with the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Defense on food insecurity among veterans, including by collaborating with the Secretaries to develop materials related to food insecurity for the Transition Assistance Program curriculum and other transition-related resources.

(D) To develop and provide training, including training that may count towards continuing education or licensure requirements, for social workers, dietitians, chaplains, and other clinicians on how to
assist veterans with enrollment in Federal nutrition assistance programs, including the supplemental nutrition assistance program under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.) and the special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children established by section 17 of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1786).

“(E) To issue guidance to Department medical centers on how to collaborate with their State and local offices administering the supplemental nutrition assistance program under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.).

“(2) In carrying out the responsibilities under paragraph (1), the Director shall consult with and provide technical assistance to the heads of other Federal departments and agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, Department of Defense, and Department of Labor.

“(c) ANNUAL REPORT ON FOOD INSECURITY.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives an annual report on veteran food insecurity.”
(b) Clerical Amendment.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

"324. Office of Food Insecurity."

(c) Pilot Program.—

(1) Authority.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, acting through the Director of the Office of Food Insecurity, shall carry out a pilot program under which the Secretary shall—

(A) make grants to eligible entities for the purpose of supporting partnerships that address food insecurity among veterans and family members of veterans, including veterans who receive services through Vet Centers or other facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs as determined by the Secretary; and

(B) make grants to eligible entities for the purpose of supporting partnerships that address food insecurity among veterans who have recently transitioned from serving as members of the Armed Forces to civilian life, and the family members of such members.

(2) Eligible Entities.—In this paragraph, the term "eligible entity" means—

(A) a nonprofit organization;

(B) a veterans service organization;
(C) a public agency;

(D) an Indian Tribe or Tribal organization;

(E) a community-based organization; or

(F) an institution of higher education.

(3) DISTRIBUTION OF GRANTS.—

(A) GENERAL GRANTS.—In making grants under paragraph (1)(A), the Secretary shall award at least one grant to at least one eligible entity in each State, if the Secretary determines that there is such an entity in a State that has applied for, and meets requirements for the award of, such a grant. The Secretary may award not more than five additional grants under subsection (a)(1) to eligible entities that principally serve Native Americans.

(B) TRANSITION GRANTS.—The Secretary shall award at least one grant under paragraph (1)(B) in five different geographic areas that the Secretary determines have a high rate of individuals described in such paragraph.

(4) USE OF FUNDS.—Any grant awarded under this subsection—

(A) shall be used to either or both—
(i) increase access to and enrollment in Federal assistance programs, including the supplemental nutrition assistance program under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 et seq.), the special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children established by section 17 of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1786), and the low-income home energy assistance program established under the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act of 1981 (42 U.S.C. 8621 et seq.), and any other assistance program that the Secretary determines advisable; and

(ii) increase participation in nutrition counseling programs and provide educational materials and counseling to veterans and family members of veterans to address food insecurity and healthy diets among those individuals; and

(B) in addition to carrying out either or both of the activities under subparagraph (A), may be used to provide direct food assistance to covered individuals, or otherwise to provide as-
assistance to covered individuals in accessing food.

(5) APPLICATION REQUIREMENT.—An eligible entity seeking a grant under this paragraph shall submit to the Secretary an application therefor at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

(6) SELECTION OF RECIPIENTS.—The Secretary shall select eligible entities that submit applications under paragraph (5) for the award of grants using a competitive process that takes into account the following:

(A) Capacity of the applicant entity to serve covered individuals.

(B) Demonstrated need of the population the applicant entity would serve.

(C) Demonstrated need of the applicant entity for assistance from the grants.

(D) Capacity of the applicant entity to serve covered individuals from underserved or disadvantaged populations.

(E) Such other criteria as the Secretary considers appropriate.

(7) DURATION.—The Secretary shall carry out this subsection for a five-year period.
(8) Amounts.—

(A) General Grants.—Each grant awarded under subparagraph (A) of paragraph (1) may not exceed $150,000 per year.

(B) Transition Grants.—Each grant awarded under subparagraph (B) of paragraph (1) may not exceed $75,000 per year.

(9) Multiple Grants.—The Secretary may award grants to an eligible entity under both subparagraphs (A) and (B) of paragraph (1).

(10) Information.—The Secretary shall collect such information from eligible entities that receive a grant under this subsection as the Secretary determines appropriate to monitor and evaluate the use of grants, including data regarding the results or outcomes of the services provided to covered individuals under the grant. Such information shall be furnished in such form and manner as the Secretary may specify.

(11) Annual Report.—During the life of the pilot program under this subsection, the Secretary shall include in the annual report under section 324(e) of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), a study on the effectiveness of the grants made under the pilot program, broken down
by grants awarded under subparagraphs (A) and 
(B) of paragraph (1), respectively. With respect to 
grants awarded under such subparagraph (B), such 
study shall—

(A) measure the need for food assistance 
by individuals described in such subparagraph 
(B); and

(B) include a description of how improving 
access to food during the period in which an in-
dividual transitions from service in the armed 
forces to civilian life affects the outcomes of the 
individual and the family of the individual.

(12) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

(A) The term “covered individual” means 
any veteran or family member described in sub-
paragraph (A) or (B) of paragraph (1).

(B) The term “Indian Tribe” has the 
meaning given such term in section 4 of the In-
dian Self-Determination and Education Assist-

(C) The term “Native American” has the 
meaning given that term in section 3765 of title 
38, United States Code.

(D) The term “State” means each of the 
several States, Territories, and possessions of
the United States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.