

S 2694

Veterans' Choice of Representation and Benefits Enhancement Act of 2006

Congress: 109 (2005–2007, Ended)

Chamber: Senate

Policy Area: Armed Forces and National Security

Introduced: May 2, 2006

Current Status: Unfavorable Executive Comment Received from Veterans' Affairs.

Latest Action: Unfavorable Executive Comment Received from Veterans' Affairs. (Sep 21, 2006)

Official Text: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/senate-bill/2694>

Sponsor

Name: Sen. Craig, Larry E. [R-ID]

Party: Republican • **State:** ID • **Chamber:** Senate

Cosponsors (5 total)

Cosponsor	Party / State	Role	Date Joined
Sen. Graham, Lindsey [R-SC]	R · SC		May 2, 2006
Sen. Hutchison, Kay Bailey [R-TX]	R · TX		May 9, 2006
Sen. Jeffords, James M. [I-VT]	I · VT		May 10, 2006
Sen. Chambliss, Saxby [R-GA]	R · GA		May 19, 2006
Sen. Murkowski, Lisa [R-AK]	R · AK		May 22, 2006

Committee Activity

Committee	Chamber	Activity	Date
Financial Services Committee	House	Referred To	Sep 7, 2006
Veterans' Affairs Committee	House	Referred To	Sep 7, 2006
Veterans' Affairs Committee	Senate	Markup By	Jan 24, 2011

Subjects & Policy Tags

Policy Area:

Armed Forces and National Security

Related Bills

Bill	Relationship	Last Action
109 HR 5549	Related bill	Jun 7, 2006: Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Veterans' Choice of Representation and Benefits Enhancement Act of 2006 - **Title I: Veterans' Representation** - (Sec. 101) Amends federal veterans' benefits provisions to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (Secretary) to prescribe: (1) qualifications and standards of conduct for agents and attorneys acting on behalf of veterans in claim proceedings before the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), including good moral character and appropriate experience and training; and (2) restrictions on fees collected for such services. Authorizes the Secretary to collect a registration fee from recognized agents and attorneys. Directs the Secretary to prescribe the amount and frequency of collection of such fees.

Provides as an additional basis for the suspension of agents and attorneys the presentation of frivolous claims, issues, or arguments to the VA.

Repeals a provision prohibiting a veteran claimant from hiring an attorney during the VA administrative process. Revises the time period during which attorney fee agreements may be filed with the Board of Veterans' Appeals. Allows the Secretary to review such an agreement, and order a fee reduction if the Secretary finds the fee excessive or unreasonable.

Title II: Memorial Affairs - (Sec. 201) Authorizes the Secretary to make grants to tribal organizations for establishing, expanding, or improving veterans' cemeteries on trust lands owned by, or held in trust for, such organization.

(Sec. 202) Directs the Secretary of the Army to remove the remains of Russell Wayne Wagner from Arlington National Cemetery, and to notify next-of-kin.

(Sec. 203) Amends the Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001 to provide the VA grave marker benefit to veterans dying on or after November 1, 1990 (currently September 11, 2001). Makes permanent (currently terminates December 31, 2006) the authority to provide such markers. Authorizes the provision of headstones (currently, only markers). Allows for the placing of a headstone or marker as close as possible to the grave when its placing on the grave itself is impossible or impracticable.

Title III: Education Matters - (Sec. 301) Expands the programs of education eligible for the accelerated payment of educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill for veterans with at least three years of active-duty service to include an approved program of education lasting less than two years that leads to employment in the transportation, construction, hospitality, or energy sectors. Terminates such authority at the end of FY2011.

(Sec. 302) Authorizes the accelerated payment of veterans' survivors and dependents' educational assistance with respect to an eligible person enrolled in an approved program of education: (1) that leads to employment in a high technology occupation; or (2) lasting less than two years that leads to employment in the transportation, construction, hospitality, or energy sectors, and the person is charged tuition and fees that exceeds 200 percent of the monthly educational assistance otherwise payable. Provides accelerated payment requirements and limits, including charges against the educational assistance entitlement for the accelerated payments.

(Sec. 303) Establishes funding levels for FY2007 and thereafter for the VA reimbursement of expenses of state approving agencies in the administration of veterans' educational benefits.

(Sec. 304) Extends through 2011 a biennial reporting requirement from the Secretaries of Veterans Affairs and Defense on the operation of the Montgomery GI Bill educational assistance program.

Title IV: Health Matters - (Sec. 401) Directs the Secretary to designate and establish at least: (1) six VA health care facilities as centers of Parkinson's disease research, education, and clinical activities; and (2) two VA health care facilities as Multiple Sclerosis Centers of Excellence. Requires the Secretary to assure appropriate geographic distribution of such centers. Outlines center requirements, including establishing peer review panels and entering into arrangements with accredited medical schools for education and training in the diagnosis and treatment of such diseases. Authorizes appropriations for the support of research and education activities at such centers.

(Sec. 402) Repeals the four-year term limits for the VA positions of Under Secretary for Health and Under Secretary for Benefits.

(Sec. 403) Directs the Secretary to pay each state home for nursing home care provided to any veteran: (1) in need of such care for a service-connected disability; or (2) who has a service-connected disability rated at 70 percent or more and is in need of such care. Requires the Secretary to furnish prescription drugs and medicines for any veteran: (1) not being provided nursing home care but in need of such drugs or medicines for a service-connected disability; or (2) who has a service-connected disability rated at 50 percent or more and is in need of such drugs and medicines. Requires each state home that requests such payment or reimbursement to furnish appropriate veteran identifying information.

Provides a three-year program, terminating at the end of FY2009, detailing conditions under which the Secretary may treat a non-VA health facility, or up to 100 beds in a non-VA health facility, as a state home for purposes of eligibility for veterans' home per diem payments.

(Sec. 404) Establishes within the Office of the Under Secretary for Health the Office of Rural Health, headed by a Director, to undertake specified activities with respect to care and services for veterans residing in rural areas.

(Sec. 405) Requires the Secretary to carry out a two-year pilot program to assess the feasibility and advisability of various mechanisms to expand and improve veteran caregiver assistance services. Provides for: (1) program funding; and (2) the allocation of funds to VA facilities. Requires a report from the Secretary to the congressional veterans' committees on program implementation.

Title V: Homeless Veterans Assistance - (Sec. 501) Reaffirms: (1) the national goal to end chronic homelessness among veterans within a decade of the enactment of the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001; and (2) encouraging all federal and local departments and agencies and public and private sector entities and organizations to work cooperatively to achieve such goal.

(Sec. 502) Expresses the sense of Congress that: (1) homelessness is a significant problem in the veterans community, and veterans are disproportionately represented among the homeless; (2) all essential services, assistance, and support that homeless veterans require are not currently provided; (3) federally funded programs for homeless veterans should be held accountable and should include the prevention of homelessness; (4) federal efforts regarding homeless veterans should be particularly vigorous where women veterans have minor children in their care; (5) federal agencies should cooperate more fully to address the problem of homelessness among veterans; and (6) the programs reauthorized by this title provide important housing and services to homeless veterans.

(Sec. 503) Makes permanent (currently terminates at the end of FY2006) and increases the annual authorization of appropriations for grants for comprehensive service programs for homeless veterans.

(Sec. 504) Extends through FY2011: (1) the authority of the Secretary to provide treatment and rehabilitation for seriously mentally ill and homeless veterans; (2) the authority of the Secretary to transfer to homeless veterans' housing programs

real property obtained by the VA through foreclosure of home mortgages; (3) a VA grant program for homeless veterans with special needs; and (4) the Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans (adding three new members to such Committee).

(Sec. 507) Extends through FY2012 the authorization of appropriations for the VA technical assistance grant program.

(Sec. 508) Requires the inclusion, in a currently-required annual report on assistance to homeless veterans, of information on the Secretary's efforts to coordinate the delivery of housing and services to homeless veterans with certain other federal departments and agencies.

(Sec. 510) Amends the United States Housing Act of 1937 to extent through FY2011 the funding for rental assistance vouchers for a VA-supported housing program for homeless veterans. Directs the Secretary to conduct a study of, and report to the veterans' committees on, the effectiveness of the voucher program in meeting the housing and case management needs of veterans who: (1) have a chronic mental illness or substance abuse disorder; and (2) are participating in continuing treatment for such illness or disorder as a condition for the receipt of rental housing assistance.

(Sec. 511) Directs the Secretary to provide financial assistance (in the form of per diem payments) to eligible entities for supportive services for very low-income veteran families occupying permanent housing. Requires the Secretary to give a preference to entities providing or coordinating the provision of supportive services to families who are transitioning from homelessness to permanent housing. Requires the assistance to be equitably distributed across geographic regions, including rural communities and tribal lands. Outlines authorized supportive services and service provider application requirements. Requires the Secretary to provide training and technical assistance to participating entities regarding the planning, development, and provision of such services (with a fiscal year funding limit). Provides program funding through FY2009. Directs the Secretary to conduct a study of, and report to the veterans' committees on, the effectiveness of the program in meeting the needs of very low-income veteran families.

Title VI: Miscellaneous Benefits - (Sec. 601) Authorizes the VA to guarantee loans to purchase stock or membership in a cooperative housing corporation in order to allow veterans to occupy a single family residential unit owned or leased by such corporation.

(Sec. 602) Increases from \$20,000 to \$30,000, during the period beginning on October 1, 2007, and ending on September 31, 2011, the Service-Disabled Veterans' Insurance maximum coverage for totally disabled veterans.

(Sec. 603) Extends through FY2011 the authority of the: (1) VA to obtain veteran income information from the Secretary of the Treasury or the Commissioner of Social Security; and (2) Internal Revenue Service to share such information with the Secretary.

(Sec. 604) States that the prohibition on the VA payment of various types of compensation (pension, training and rehabilitation, educational assistance, etc.) to veterans incarcerated in a federal, state, or local penal institution also applies to any other (private contractor) penal institution or correctional facility.

Actions Timeline

- **Sep 21, 2006:** Unfavorable Executive Comment Received from Veterans' Affairs.
- **Sep 6, 2006:** Received in the House.
- **Sep 6, 2006:** Referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and in addition to the Committee on Financial Services, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
- **Aug 4, 2006:** Message on Senate action sent to the House.
- **Aug 3, 2006:** Passed/agreed to in Senate: Passed Senate with an amendment and an amendment to the Title by Unanimous Consent.(consideration: CR S8884-8893; text as passed Senate: CR S8884-8891)
- **Aug 3, 2006:** Passed Senate with an amendment and an amendment to the Title by Unanimous Consent. (consideration: CR S8884-8893; text as passed Senate: CR S8884-8891)
- **Jul 27, 2006:** Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Reported by Senator Craig with an amendment in the nature of a substitute and an amendment to the title. With written report No. 109-297.
- **Jul 27, 2006:** Placed on Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders. Calendar No. 540.
- **Jun 22, 2006:** Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Ordered to be reported with an amendment in the nature of a substitute favorably.
- **Jun 8, 2006:** Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Hearings held. Hearings printed: S.Hrg. 109-715.
- **May 2, 2006:** Introduced in Senate
- **May 2, 2006:** Sponsor introductory remarks on measure. (CR S3896-3897)
- **May 2, 2006:** Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. (text of measure as introduced: CR S3897-3898)

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