111TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION  

S. 1556  

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to permit facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs to be designated as voter registration agencies, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES  
AUGUST 3, 2009  

Mrs. FEINSTEIN (for herself, Mr. KERRY, Mr. DODD, Mr. LEAHY, and Ms. MIKULSKI) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs

A BILL  

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to permit facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs to be designated as voter registration agencies, and for other purposes.

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Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
2  
tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
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SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
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This Act may be cited as the “Veteran Voting Sup-
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port Act of 2009”.
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SEC. 2. FINDINGS.
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Congress makes the following findings:
(1) Veterans have performed a great service to, and risked the greatest sacrifice in the name of, our country, and should be supported by the people and the Government of the United States.

(2) Veterans are especially qualified to understand issues of war, foreign policy, and government support for veterans, and they should have the opportunity to voice that understanding through voting.

(3) The Department of Veterans Affairs should assist veterans to register to vote and to vote.

SEC. 3. VOTER REGISTRATION AND ASSISTANCE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs (in this section referred to as the “Secretary”) shall provide a mail voter registration application form to each veteran—

(1) who seeks to enroll in the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system (including enrollment in a medical center, a community living center, a community-based outpatient center, or a domiciliary of the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system), at the time of such enrollment; and

(2) who is enrolled in such health care sys-
(A) at any time when there is a change in
the enrollment status of the veteran; and
(B) at any time when there is a change in
the address of the veteran.

(b) **Providing Voter Registration Information
and Assistance.**—The Secretary shall provide to each
veteran described in subsection (a) the same degree of in-
formation and assistance with voter registration as is pro-
vided by the Veterans Administration with regard to the
completion of its own forms, unless the applicant refuses
such assistance.

(c) **Transmittal of Voter Registration Application Forms.**—

(1) **In General.**—The Secretary shall accept
completed voter registration application forms for
transmittal to the appropriate State election official.

(2) **Transmittal Deadline.**—

(A) **In General.**—Subject to subpara-
graph (B), a completed voter registration appli-
cation form accepted at a medical center, com-
munity living center, community-based out-
patient center, or domiciliary of the Depart-
ment of Veterans Affairs shall be transmitted
to the appropriate State election official not
later than 10 days after the date of acceptance.
(B) EXCEPTION.—If a completed voter registration application form is accepted within 5 days before the last day for registration to vote in an election, the application shall be transmitted to the appropriate State election official not later than 5 days after the date of acceptance.

(d) REQUIREMENTS OF VOTER REGISTRATION INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall ensure that the information and assistance with voter registration that is provided under subsection (b) will not—

(1) seek to influence an applicant’s political preference or party registration;

(2) display any such political preference or party allegiance;

(3) make any statement to an applicant or take any action the purpose or effect of which is to discourage the applicant from registering to vote; or

(4) make any statement to an applicant or take any action the purpose or effect of which is to lead the applicant to believe that a decision to register or not register has any bearing on the availability of services or benefits.

(e) LIMITATION ON USE OF INFORMATION.—No information relating to registering to vote, or a declination
to register to vote, under this section may be used for any purpose other than voter registration.

(f) Enforcement.—

(1) Notice.—

(A) Notice to the facility director or the secretary.—A person who is aggrieved by a violation of this section or section 4 may provide written notice of the violation to the Director of the facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system involved or to the Secretary. The Director or the Secretary shall respond to a written notice provided under the preceding sentence within 20 days of receipt of such written notice.

(B) Notice to the attorney general and the election assistance commission.—If the violation is not corrected within 90 days after receipt of a notice under subparagraph (A), the aggrieved person may provide written notice of the violation to the Attorney General and the Election Assistance Commission.

(2) Attorney general.—The Attorney General may bring a civil action in an appropriate dis-
trict court for such declaratory or injunctive relief as
is necessary to carry out this section or section 4.

SEC. 4. ASSISTANCE WITH ABSENTEE BALLOTS.

(a) In General.—Consistent with State and local
laws, each director of a community living center, a domiciliary, or a medical center of the Department of Veterans
Affairs health care system shall provide assistance in vot-
ing by absentee ballot to veterans residing in the commu-
nity living center or domiciliary or who are inpatients of
the medical center, as the case may be.

(b) Assistance Provided.—The assistance pro-
vided under subsection (a) shall include—

(1) providing information relating to the oppor-
tunity to request an absentee ballot;

(2) making available absentee ballot applica-
tions upon request, as well as assisting in completing
such applications and ballots; and

(3) working with local election administration
officials to ensure proper transmission of absentee
ballot applications and absentee ballots.

SEC. 5. INFORMATION PROVIDED BY NONPARTISAN ORGA-

NIZATIONS.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall permit non-
partisan organizations to provide voter registration infor-
information and assistance at facilities of the Department of
Veterans Affairs health care system, subject to reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, including limiting activities to regular business hours and requiring advance notice.

SEC. 6. ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY ELECTION OFFICIALS AT DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FACILITIES.

(a) DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall not prohibit any election administration official, whether State or local, party-affiliated or non-party affiliated, or elected or appointed, from providing voting information to veterans at any facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) VOTING INFORMATION.—In this subsection, the term “voting information” means nonpartisan information intended for the public about voting, including information about voter registration, voting systems, absentee balloting, polling locations, and other important resources for voters.

(b) VOTER REGISTRATION SERVICES.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide reasonable access to facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system to State and local election officials for the
purpose of providing nonpartisan voter registration services to individuals, subject to reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, including limiting activities to regular business hours and requiring advance notice.

SEC. 7. ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLIANCE.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs (in this section referred to as the “Secretary”) shall submit to Congress an annual report on how the Secretary has complied with the requirements of this Act. Such report shall include the following information with respect to the preceding year:

(1) The number of veterans who were served by facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system.

(2) The number of such veterans who requested information on or assistance with voter registration.

(3) The number of such veterans who received information on or assistance with voter registration.

(4) Information with respect to written notices submitted under section 3(f), including information with respect to the resolution of the violations alleged in such written notices.

SEC. 8. RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.

(a) No Individual Benefit.—Nothing in this Act may be construed to convey a benefit to an individual veteran.
(b) No Effect on Other Laws.—Nothing in this Act may be construed to authorize or require conduct prohibited under any of the following laws, or to supersede, restrict, or limit the application of such laws:


(2) The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act (42 U.S.C. 1973ee et seq.).

(3) The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (42 U.S.C. 1973ff et seq.).

