

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.

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. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Veteran Voting Sup-
5 port Act of 2009”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) Veterans have performed a great service to,
2 and risked the greatest sacrifice in the name of, our
3 country, and should be supported by the people and
4 the Government of the United States.

5 (2) Veterans are especially qualified to under-
6 stand issues of war, foreign policy, and government
7 support for veterans, and they should have the op-
8 portunity to voice that understanding through vot-
9 ing.

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

12 **SEC. 3. VOTER REGISTRATION AND ASSISTANCE.**

13 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
14 (in this section referred to as the “Secretary”) shall pro-
15 vide a mail voter registration application form to each vet-
16 eran—

17 (1) who seeks to enroll in the Department of
18 Veterans Affairs health care system (including en-
19 rollment in a medical center, a community living
20 center, a community-based outpatient center, or a
21 domiciliary of the Department of Veterans Affairs
22 health care system), at the time of such enrollment;
23 and

24 (2) who is enrolled in such health care sys-
25 tem—

1 (A) at any time when there is a change in
2 the enrollment status of the veteran; and

3 (B) at any time when there is a change in
4 the address of the veteran.

5 (b) PROVIDING VOTER REGISTRATION INFORMATION
6 AND ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall provide to each
7 veteran described in subsection (a) the same degree of in-
8 formation and assistance with voter registration as is pro-
9 vided by the Veterans Administration with regard to the
10 completion of its own forms, unless the applicant refuses
11 such assistance.

12 (c) TRANSMITTAL OF VOTER REGISTRATION APPLI-
13 CATION FORMS.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall accept
15 completed voter registration application forms for
16 transmittal to the appropriate State election official.

17 (2) TRANSMITTAL DEADLINE.—

18 (A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subpara-
19 graph (B), a completed voter registration appli-
20 cation form accepted at a medical center, com-
21 munity living center, community-based out-
22 patient center, or domiciliary of the Depart-
23 ment of Veterans Affairs shall be transmitted
24 to the appropriate State election official not
25 later than 10 days after the date of acceptance.

1 (B) EXCEPTION.—If a completed voter
2 registration application form is accepted within
3 5 days before the last day for registration to
4 vote in an election, the application shall be
5 transmitted to the appropriate State election of-
6 ficial not later than 5 days after the date of ac-
7 ceptance.

8 (d) REQUIREMENTS OF VOTER REGISTRATION IN-
9 FORMATION AND ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall en-
10 sure that the information and assistance with voter reg-
11 istration that is provided under subsection (b) will not—

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

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

16 (3) make any statement to an applicant or take
17 any action the purpose or effect of which is to dis-
18 courage the applicant from registering to vote; or

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

24 (e) LIMITATION ON USE OF INFORMATION.—No in-
25 formation relating to registering to vote, or a declination

1 to register to vote, under this section may be used for any
2 purpose other than voter registration.

3 (f) ENFORCEMENT.—

4 (1) NOTICE.—

5 (A) NOTICE TO THE FACILITY DIRECTOR
6 OR THE SECRETARY.—A person who is ag-
7 grieved by a violation of this section or section
8 4 may provide written notice of the violation to
9 the Director of the facility of the Department
10 of Veterans Affairs health care system involved
11 or to the Secretary. The Director or the Sec-
12 retary shall respond to a written notice provided
13 under the preceding sentence within 20 days of
14 receipt of such written notice.

15 (B) NOTICE TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
16 AND THE ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMIS-
17 SION.—If the violation is not corrected within
18 90 days after receipt of a notice under subpara-
19 graph (A), the aggrieved person may provide
20 written notice of the violation to the Attorney
21 General and the Election Assistance Commis-
22 sion.

23 (2) ATTORNEY GENERAL.—The Attorney Gen-
24 eral may bring a civil action in an appropriate dis-

1 trict court for such declaratory or injunctive relief as
2 is necessary to carry out this section or section 4.

3 **SEC. 4. ASSISTANCE WITH ABSENTEE BALLOTS.**

4 (a) **IN GENERAL.**—Consistent with State and local
5 laws, each director of a community living center, a domi-
6 ciliary, or a medical center of the Department of Veterans
7 Affairs health care system shall provide assistance in vot-
8 ing by absentee ballot to veterans residing in the commu-
9 nity living center or domiciliary or who are inpatients of
10 the medical center, as the case may be.

11 (b) **ASSISTANCE PROVIDED.**—The assistance pro-
12 vided under subsection (a) shall include—

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

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

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

21 **SEC. 5. INFORMATION PROVIDED BY NONPARTISAN ORGA-**
22 **NIZATIONS.**

23 The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall permit non-
24 partisan organizations to provide voter registration infor-
25 mation and assistance at facilities of the Department of

1 Veterans Affairs health care system, subject to reasonable
2 time, place, and manner restrictions, including limiting ac-
3 tivities to regular business hours and requiring advance
4 notice.

5 **SEC. 6. ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY ELECTION OFFICIALS**

6 **AT DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FA-**
7 **CILITIES.**

8 (a) DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to reasonable time,
10 place, and manner restrictions, the Secretary of Vet-
11 erans Affairs shall not prohibit any election adminis-
12 tration official, whether State or local, party-affili-
13 ated or non-party affiliated, or elected or appointed,
14 from providing voting information to veterans at any
15 facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

16 (2) VOTING INFORMATION.—In this subsection,
17 the term “voting information” means nonpartisan
18 information intended for the public about voting, in-
19 cluding information about voter registration, voting
20 systems, absentee balloting, polling locations, and
21 other important resources for voters.

22 (b) VOTER REGISTRATION SERVICES.—The Sec-
23 retary of Veterans Affairs shall provide reasonable access
24 to facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs health
25 care system to State and local election officials for the

1 purpose of providing nonpartisan voter registration serv-
2 ices to individuals, subject to reasonable time, place, and
3 manner restrictions, including limiting activities to regular
4 business hours and requiring advance notice.

5 **SEC. 7. ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLIANCE.**

6 The Secretary of Veterans Affairs (in this section re-
7 ferred to as the “Secretary”) shall submit to Congress an
8 annual report on how the Secretary has complied with the
9 requirements of this Act. Such report shall include the fol-
10 lowing information with respect to the preceding year:

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

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

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

18 (4) Information with respect to written notices
19 submitted under section 3(f), including information
20 with respect to the resolution of the violations al-
21 leged in such written notices.

22 **SEC. 8. RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.**

23 (a) **NO INDIVIDUAL BENEFIT.**—Nothing in this Act
24 may be construed to convey a benefit to an individual vet-
25 eran.

1 (b) NO EFFECT ON OTHER LAWS.—Nothing in this
2 Act may be construed to authorize or require conduct pro-
3 hibited under any of the following laws, or to supersede,
4 restrict, or limit the application of such laws:

5 (1) The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C.
6 1973 et seq.).

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

9 (3) The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Ab-
10 sentee Voting Act (42 U.S.C. 1973ff et seq.).

11 (4) The National Voter Registration Act of
12 1993 (42 U.S.C. 1973gg et seq.).

13 (5) The Americans with Disabilities Act of
14 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.).

15 (6) The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C.
16 701 et seq.).

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