

# HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

CHAIRMAN MIKE BOST

## Veterans Benefits Reform – Veterans Readiness and Employment

### Background:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program seeks to help disabled veterans secure meaningful employment after service. However, the VR&E program struggles to effectively track wages, outcomes, and return on investment, with 45% of veterans re-entering the program after a “successful” completion of a employment plan. Additionally, veteran applicants face long wait times, high-cost purchases continue to be made without proper oversight, and counselors are often overwhelmed by paperwork and administrative hurdles. With the expansion of eligibility under the PACT Act, VR&E participation and budget is expected to double by 2026.

This bill would address these longstanding issues by establishing oversight of the amount of money spent in the program, and, ensuring that meaningful employment for disabled veterans continues to be the goal of the program while reducing fraud, waste and abuse.

### The Message:

This bill would overhaul the fraud in VA’s VR&E program. It gives VA the tools, authority, and structure to deliver timely, cost-effective employment and training services without cumbersome bureaucratic red tape.

The restructuring would:

- Require a veteran to explain their reasoning for needing reentry into the program if they have completed the program and used all the resources necessary to find employment but remain unemployed.
- Establish a maximum amount that can be spent during a veteran’s lifetime in the program as \$250,000.
- Require the VA Secretary to sign off on any expenses for equipment over \$5,000 and require annual notification of what was purchased and the justification for each veteran within the program.
- Modify the subsistence allowance to match a veteran’s zip code of their home location instead of their institution, unless the institution is less than 25 miles away.
- Mandate that each VA Regional Office have an Employment Coordinator or someone acting in that position to seek out opportunities for veterans completing the rehab to employment.
- Authorize Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists to approve entitlement if the decision is signed off by the Veterans Readiness Counselor.
- Direct veterans to wait one year after entering and exiting the VR&E program before they can re-enroll if they are pursuing the same field of study.
- Deduct individual unemployment benefits if a veteran is enrolled in the VR&E program, unless they are enrolled in the Independent Living track to ensure veterans that truly need employment assistance are getting the care and services they need.