.....

(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. _____

To direct the Secretary of Defense to establish a pilot program to provide educational continuity services to eligible dependents of members of the Armed Forces enrolled in elementary schools or secondary schools, and for other purposes..

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. ALFORD introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Defense to establish a pilot program to provide educational continuity services to eligible dependents of members of the Armed Forces enrolled in elementary schools or secondary schools, and for other purposes..

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Pathways to Academic Triumph for Homefront Students Act'' or the ''PATHS Act''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) Military-connected students frequently experience disruptions to their education resulting from permanent changes of station, deployments, mobilizations, parental injury or illness, and other circumstances related to military service.

(2) Educational continuity contributes to military family readiness, resilience, and retention by reducing challenges associated with frequent military moves and operational demands.

(3) The Department of Defense administers military family readiness programs and provides transition assistance to military-connected students and their families through school liaison programs and other existing authorities.

(4) Existing transition assistance does not consistently provide individualized academic remediation, tutoring, credit recovery, or case management to military-connected students enrolled in schools not operated by the Department of Defense.

(5) A targeted pilot program would allow the Department of Defense to evaluate whether educational continuity services improve academic outcomes, ease educational transitions, and strengthen military family readiness.

SEC. 3. PATHWAYS TO ACADEMIC TRIUMPH FOR HOMEFRONT STUDENTS PILOT PROGRAM.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Defense shall establish and carry out a pilot program to be known as the ''Pathways to Academic Triumph for Homefront Students Pilot Program'' (in this section referred to as the ''Pilot Program'') to provide educational continuity services to eligible dependents of members of the Armed Forces enrolled in elementary schools or secondary schools.

(b) SCOPE.—To the extent practicable, the Secretary shall carry out the Pilot Program—

(1) at not fewer than five geographically diverse locations;

(2) in a manner that includes dependents of members of—

(A) more than one of the Armed Forces; and

(B) the regular components and the reserve components of the Armed Forces; and

(3) in coordination with local educational agencies and existing school liaison programs serving participating students.

(c) ELIGIBILITY.—

(1) ELIGIBLE STUDENT.—A student is eligible to participate in the Pilot Program if the student—

(A) is enrolled in an elementary school or secondary school;

(B) is the dependent of—

(i) a member of the Armed Forces serving on active duty;

(ii) a member of a reserve component serving on active duty for a period of more than 30 days or on full-time National Guard duty;

(iii) a member or former member of the Armed Forces recovering from a serious service-connected illness or injury, as determined by the Secretary; or

(iv) a member or former member of the Armed Forces who died while serving on active duty or as a result of a service-connected illness or injury, as determined by the Secretary; and

(C) demonstrates, in accordance with criteria established by the Secretary, that the student's educational progress has been adversely affected by a military service-related disruption.

(2) DOCUMENTATION.—The Secretary—

(A) shall establish procedures for documenting eligibility under paragraph (1) that

minimize the burden on parents and students of proving such eligibility and shall permit documentation from a parent or guardian, school official, school liaison, health care provider, military command, or other source determined appropriate by the Secretary; and

(B) may not require the disclosure of medical, educational, or personnel records to the Department of Defense beyond the minimum information necessary to determine eligibility.

(3) PRIORITY.—If the number of eligible students exceeds the capacity of the Pilot Program, the Secretary shall prioritize for participation in the Pilot Program eligible students who—

(A) demonstrate the greatest academic need;

(B) have experienced multiple permanent changes of station;

(C) face significant educational transition or credit-transfer challenges; or

(D) lack access to comparable academic support.

(d) AUTHORIZED ARRANGEMENTS.—The Secretary may carry out the Pilot Program through grants, contracts, cooperative agreements, or other authorized ar-

rangements with nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education, local educational agencies, State educational agencies, interstate compact organizations, or other qualified entities with demonstrated experience serving students who are dependents of members of the Armed Forces.

(e) AUTHORIZED SERVICES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to the availability of appropriations, the Secretary may provide or purchase educational continuity services for eligible students participating in the Pilot Program, including—

(A) evidence-based tutoring;

(B) academic diagnostic assessments;

(C) progress monitoring;

(D) transition support following a permanent change of station or other military service-related disruption;

(E) credit recovery;

(F) academic case management;

(G) college and career transition counseling related to educational continuity;

(H) approved virtual learning supports; and

(I) other evidence-based educational continuity services determined appropriate by the Secretary.

(2) PAYMENTS.—Whenever practicable, payments for services under this section shall be made directly to an approved provider.

(3) SUPPLEMENT, NOT SUPPLANT.—Assistance under this section shall supplement and not supplant services otherwise available under Federal law, State or local law, or Department of Defense programs.

(4) NO CASH BENEFIT.—No participant shall receive assistance under the Pilot Program in the form of an unrestricted cash payment.

(f) DURATION.—The Secretary shall provide services under the Pilot Program for three consecutive academic years, beginning on the first day of the first full academic year that begins at least 180 days after the date on which amounts are first appropriated to carry out the Pilot Program.

(g) IMPLEMENTATION AND SAFEGUARDS.—

(1) STANDARDS.—The Secretary shall establish standards governing—

(A) provider qualifications;

(B) student privacy and data security;

(C) child protection;

(D) performance accountability;

(E) financial oversight;

(F) conflict-of-interest protections;

(G) parental consent;

(H) accessibility for students with disabilities; and

(I) data collection and reporting.

(2) ADMINISTRATIVE COST LIMITATION.—Of the amounts made available to carry out the Pilot Program, the Secretary may use not more than 20 percent for program administration, data collection, and evaluation.

(h) EVALUATION.—

(1) INDEPENDENT EVALUATION.—The Secretary shall provide for an independent evaluation of the Pilot Program by an entity with demonstrated expertise in program evaluation and education research that is not otherwise receiving funds to provide educational continuity services under the Pilot Program.

(2) EVALUATION DESIGN.—The evaluation shall, to the extent practicable—

(A) measure outcomes against a baseline established before or at the beginning of a student's participation;

(B) use a comparison group or another rigorous evaluation method appropriate to the size and design of the Pilot Program;

(C) account for differences in grade level, type of military service-related disruption, service branch, component, geographic location, and school setting; and

(D) protect personally identifiable information.

(3) PERFORMANCE MEASURES.—The evaluation shall include measures of—

(A) participation, service utilization, and program completion;

(B) attendance and educational continuity;

(C) academic growth, course completion, credit accumulation, or credit recovery, as appropriate;

(D) successful educational transitions;

(E) student and parent satisfaction;

(F) military family readiness indicators determined appropriate by the Secretary; and

(G) program costs and costs per participant.

(4) PRIVACY.—Data collected under this section shall be maintained, used, and disclosed in accordance with applicable Federal and State privacy laws.

(i) CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT AND REPORTS.—

(1) ANNUAL BRIEFINGS.—Not later than one year after the date on which amounts are first appropriated for the Pilot Program, and annually thereafter for the duration of the Pilot Program, the Secretary shall brief the congressional defense committees on—

(A) implementation of and participation in the Pilot Program;

(B) expenditures and obligations of the Pilot Program;

(C) geographic locations where the Pilot Program is or will be implemented;

(D) the number of participants in the Pilot Program from each Armed Force, disaggregated by members of an active component and members of a reserve component;

(E) preliminary outcomes of the Pilot Program; and

(F) any barriers to implementation of the Pilot Program.

(2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after completion of the final academic year of the Pilot Program, the Secretary shall submit to the congressional defense committees a report on the Pilot Program containing—

(A) participation and demographic data in aggregate or de-identified form;

(B) expenditures, obligations, and cost per participant;

(C) the results of the independent evaluation required by subsection (h);

(D) lessons learned; and

(E) recommendations regarding continuation, modification, expansion, or termination of the Pilot Program.

(j) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Defense $5,000,000 for fiscal year 2027 to carry out the Pilot Program, to remain available through September 30, 2031.

(k) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this section may be construed to—

(1) create an entitlement to educational assistance;

(2) alter the responsibilities of the Department of Defense Education Activity other than as necessary to carry out the Pilot Program;

(3) require participation by any student or family;

(4) affect the responsibilities of a State or local educational agency under any other provision of law; or

(5) authorize the Secretary to control or direct the curriculum, instruction, administration, or personnel of a State or local educational agency.

(l) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) CONGRESSIONAL DEFENSE COMMITTEES.—The term ''congressional defense committees'' has the meaning given the term in section 101(a) of title 10, United States Code.

(2) EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY SERVICE.—The term ''educational continuity service'' means a service that addresses an educational need caused or materially aggravated by a military service-related disruption.

(3) ESEA TERMS.—The terms ''elementary school'', ''local educational agency'', ''secondary school'', and ''State educational agency'' have the meanings given such terms in section 8101 of the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

(4) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The term ''institution of higher education'' has the meaning given such term in section 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1002.

(5) MILITARY SERVICE-RELATED DISRUPTION.—The term ''military service-related disruption'' means—

(A) a permanent change of station;

(B) a deployment of a parent or guardian who is a member of the Armed Forces serving on active duty;

(C) a serious service-connected illness, injury, or death of a parent or guardian who is or was a member of the Armed Forces, as determined by the Secretary;

(D) a transition to or from a school operated by the Department of Defense; or

(E) another circumstance directly related to military service that the Secretary determines is likely to disrupt the educational progress of a dependent student.