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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. \_\_\_\_

To enhance military recruitment by improving access to student directory information, enabling the military to inform prospective applicants about service options and the benefits of military service, such as competitive pay, education, and valuable experience, which is crucial for meeting National Security Strategy requirements and supporting combatant commander demand.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mrs. KIGGANS of Virginia introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on \_\_\_\_\_

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# A BILL

To enhance military recruitment by improving access to student directory information, enabling the military to inform prospective applicants about service options and the benefits of military service, such as competitive pay, education, and valuable experience, which is crucial for meeting National Security Strategy requirements and supporting combatant commander demand.

*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 “Service Enlistment and Recruitment of Valuable Engagement Act” or the “SERVE Act”.

## **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) Ensuring that the United States has a sufficient number of qualified active duty military personnel is a matter of national security. To maintain force levels, the Department of Defense must balance recruiting new members with retaining trained servicemembers. However, the current recruitment environment is the most challenging it has been in 50 years. A combination of factors, including a strong economy, a shrinking eligible population, and declining trust in institutions among Generation Z, has significantly impacted the Department’s ability to recruit. As of 2022, only 12 percent of youth had a parent who served in the military, down from 40 percent in 1995.

(2) The disconnect between today’s youth and the military has led to a lack of awareness regarding the benefits of military service, such as competitive pay, career training, and a meaningful mission. Research indicates that over half of youth have never considered military service, underscoring the urgent need for a renewed national call to service.

(3) The Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) program offers essential leadership training and character development for high school students. By establishing formalized authorization for students without a JROTC unit at their school to utilize JROTC units at other school within their school district, we will improve access and opportunities for students.

## **SEC. 3. IMPROVEMENTS ON ACCESS TO POTENTIAL APPLICANTS.**

(a) MEANINGFUL ACCESS TO HIGH SCHOOLS.—

(1) **RECRUITING.**—Section 503(c)(1)(A) of chapter 31 of title 10, United States Code, is amended—

(A) in clause (i), by striking “the same access to secondary school students as is provided generally to postsecondary educational institutions or to prospective employers of those students” and inserting “meaningful access to secondary schools, including monthly visits or at a minimum no fewer than 4 times per academic year spread across the school year, in high traffic areas during peak school hours, lunch periods, between classes in a manner that does not interfere with class attendance, and with reasonable notice, in auditoriums and other meeting spaces, at athletic functions and other group or social activities”; and

(B) in clause (iii)—

(i) by striking “60 days” and inserting “the 60th day after the start of the school year, and thereafter, not later than 30 days”; and

(ii) by inserting “academic grades, genders,” after “student names,”.

(2) **ROTC ACCESS.**—Section 983(b) of title 10, United States Code, is amended—

(A) in paragraph (1), by striking “in a manner that is at least equal in quality and scope to the access to campuses and to students that is provided to any other employer” and inserting “that, at a minimum, includes no fewer than 4 times per academic year spread across the school year during peak school hours, while classes are in session, in high-traffic areas, and with reasonable notice, in auditoriums and other meeting spaces, and during athletic functions and other group or social activities”; and

(B) in paragraph (2)—

(i) in subparagraph (A)—

(I) by inserting “academic grades, genders,” after “names,”; and

(II) by striking “60th day” and inserting “60th day after the start of the school year and thereafter not later than 30 days”; and

(ii) in subparagraph (B), by striking the period at the end and inserting a semicolon; and

(C) by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

“(3) access by military recruiters for purposes of military recruiting, with respect to students (who are 17 years of age or older) not returning to the institution after having been enrolled during the previous semester—

“(A) the information required under subparagraphs (A) and (B); and

“(B) the reason for failure to return, if collected by the institution; and

“(4) access by military recruiters for purposes of military recruiting to lists of students (who are 17 years of age or older) enrolled at that institution (or any subelement of that institution) who have submitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, together with the listed information required under subparagraphs (A) and (B), if collected by the institution.”.

#### **SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF AFFILIATION TYPES FOR JROTC.**

(a) **POLICY.**—The Department of Defense shall establish policy to create two types of affiliation within the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) program, as follows:

(1) **HOST UNIT.**—A JROTC unit located at a high school that has a Memorandum of Agreement with a military department to maintain a JROTC program on its campus, staffed full-time.

(2) **CROSS-TOWN.**—A high school that has an agreement with a host JROTC unit's institution, allowing its students to enroll in the JROTC program of the host unit and participate in activities at both campuses, without dedicated staff.

(b) **GUIDANCE.**—The Department of Defense shall issue guidance to implement these affiliation types within the JROTC program, ensuring clarity on the roles, responsibilities, and requirements for each affiliation type.

**SEC. 5. ESTABLISHMENT OF PILOT PROGRAM TO RECOGNIZE MILITARY-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS.**

(a) **ESTABLISHMENT OF PILOT PROGRAM.**—The Secretary of Defense shall establish a two-year pilot program to recognize high schools that demonstrate military enlistment rates above the State average. The program shall aim to highlight and support schools that foster a culture of service and commitment to national defense by encouraging military enlistment among their students.

(b) **DESIGNATION OF SCHOOLS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—As part of the pilot program, the Secretary of Defense shall designate eligible high schools as “HERO schools” (Honoring Excellence and Recruitment Opportunities) based on their military enlistment rates and demonstrated support for students interested in serving in the Armed Forces.

(2) **DESIGNATION.**—The designation shall be made in a formal letter from the Secretary of Defense, which shall be sent to each school that meets the criteria outlined in subsection (c).

(c) **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA.**—To be eligible for the designation, a school must meet the following criteria:

(1) The school must have a military enlistment rate that exceeds the State average for high schools in the same grade band (9th through 12th grade).

(2) The school must have programs, activities, or partnerships in place that support students' aspirations for military service, including access to military recruiters, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) programs, and military preparation coursework.

(3) The school must demonstrate a commitment to fostering a positive relationship with military services via the local recruiting stations and an understanding of the opportunities available through military enlistment.

(d) PILOT PROGRAM DURATION.—The pilot program shall last for two years, with a review of its effectiveness and impact at the end of the first year.

**SEC. 6. PRIORITY CONSIDERATION FOR APPLICANTS FROM HIGH SCHOOLS WITH ABOVE-AVERAGE MILITARY ENLISTMENT RATES.**

(a) PRIORITY CONSIDERATION FOR MILITARY SERVICE ACADEMY APPLICANTS.—The Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force, shall establish a policy to provide priority consideration for admission to the military service academies (the United States Military Academy, the United States Naval Academy, the United States Air Force Academy, and the United States Coast Guard Academy) for applicants who are graduates of high schools with military enlistment rates above the State average.

(b) ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR PRIORITY CONSIDERATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible for priority consideration, a high school must meet the following criteria:

(A) The high school's military enlistment rate exceeds the State average for high schools in the same grade band (9th through 12th grade).

(B) The high school demonstrates ongoing support for military service and provide resources for students interested in military careers, including access to recruiters,

Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) programs, and military preparatory coursework.

(C) The school has a documented history of encouraging students to pursue military service as a viable post-graduation option.

(2) **PRIORITY STATUS.**—Applicants from eligible high schools shall receive priority status in the admissions process for each respective military service academy, including consideration for appointments and appointments from congressional nominations.

## **SEC. 7. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.**

(a) **REPORT ON JROTC POLICY.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall submit a report to the congressional defense committees on the status of the policy established under section 4(a).

(2) **ELEMENTS.**—The report required under paragraph (1) shall include the following elements:

(A) The number and locations of cross-town units established under the new policy.

(B) Total enrollment numbers for each cross-town institution.

(C) Recommendations for further improvements or changes to enhance the effectiveness of the JROTC program.

(b) **REPORT ON PILOT PROGRAM TO RECOGNIZE MILITARY-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS.**—The Secretary of Defense shall submit a report to Congress not later than 90 days after the conclusion of the two-year pilot program established under section 5. The report shall include—

(1) a list of schools designated as HERO schools;

(2) an analysis of the impact of the designation on military enlistment rates and school culture; and

(3) recommendations for the expansion or continuation of the program beyond the pilot phase.

(c) REPORTS ON POLICY TO PROVIDE PRIORITY CONSIDERATION FOR APPLICANTS FROM HIGH SCHOOLS WITH ABOVE-AVERAGE MILITARY ENLISTMENT RATES.—

(1) IMPLEMENTATION REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to Congress a report outlining the process for identifying eligible high schools under section 6, the criteria used for determining military enlistment rates, and a timeline for the implementation of the priority consideration policy under such section.

(2) ANNUAL REPORT.—The Secretary of Defense shall submit to Congress an annual report on the number of applicants receiving priority consideration under section 6, the cities and States where the applicants attended high school, the outcomes of their applications, and any impacts on military service academy enrollment patterns.

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