

S. 1944, Vet Center Improvement Act of 2021

As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on December 15, 2021

By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2022	2022-2027	2022-2032
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	0	0
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	0	63	not estimated
Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	No	Mandate Effects	
Increases on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2033?	No	Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No

S. 1944 would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to carry out a program to provide grants to entities that address food insecurity among veterans and their family members. The department would be required to begin the program within 18 months of enactment and provide grants for three years after it begins the program. The bill would authorize appropriations of \$15 million for each fiscal year that the program operates. CBO expects that each year of the program would span more than one fiscal year; thus, we estimate the bill would authorize appropriations of \$60 million for the grant program over four fiscal years. Eligible grant recipients include nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, public agencies, or institutions of higher education. The grants would be used to support partnerships among entities that address food insecurity among veterans and their families and to increase participation in nutrition counseling programs and federal food assistance programs. CBO estimates that implementing the program would cost \$58 million over the 2022-2027 period; such spending would be subject to appropriation of the specified amounts.

The bill also would require several actions regarding Vet Centers, which are VA facilities that provide social and psychological services to veterans, military service members, and their families. It would require VA to:

- Collect feedback from Vet Center employees on their productivity expectations;
- Develop, implement, and regularly update a staffing model for those facilities; and

- Standardize roles and expectations for staff positions at those centers.

CBO expects that VA would need to adapt its information technology systems to collect staff feedback. Based on the cost of similar information technology efforts, CBO estimates that satisfying that requirement would cost \$1 million over the 2022-2027 period.

VA has plans to address counselor and staffing expectations and productivity. CBO expects that VA would include a new staffing model and hiring practices as part of those plans.

Finally, the bill would require three reports from the Government Accountability Office that would include an annual audit on VA staff feedback, an assessment on VA's physical infrastructure and future investments in its Vet Centers, and an evaluation of the grant program on food assistance required in the bill. In addition, S. 1944 would require two annual and a one-time report to the Congress about improving staffing and hiring practices at Vet Centers. Based on costs for similar activities, CBO estimates that satisfying those requirements would cost \$4 million over the 2022-2027 period.

The costs of the legislation, detailed in Table 1, fall within budget function 700 (veterans benefits and services).

Table 1. Estimated Increases in Spending Subject to Appropriation Under S.1944							
	By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars						2022-2027
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	
Grant Program							
Estimated Authorization	0	0	15	15	15	15	60
Estimated Outlays	0	0	13	15	15	15	58
Vet Centers							
Estimated Authorization	0	1	*	0	0	0	1
Estimated Outlays	0	1	*	0	0	0	1
Reports & Studies							
Estimated Authorization	0	*	1	1	1	1	4
Estimated Outlays	0	*	1	1	1	1	4
Total Changes							
Estimated Authorization	0	1	16	16	16	16	65
Estimated Outlays	0	1	14	16	16	16	63

* = between zero and \$500,000.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Etaf Khan. The estimate was reviewed by Leo Lex, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.