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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R.

To amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a secure database and messaging platform to enable veterans to reconnect with other veterans with whom they served, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a secure database and messaging platform to enable veterans to reconnect with other veterans with whom they served, 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 “Vets Connect Act”.

1 SEC. 2. VETS CONNECT SECURE DATABASE AND MES-

2 **SAGING PLATFORM.**

3 (a) ESTABLISHMENT OF SECURE DATABASE AND
4 MESSAGING PLATFORM.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
5 fairs shall establish and maintain a secure, privacy-pre-
6 serving database and messaging platform (in this section
7 referred to as the “Vets Connect System”) for the purpose
8 of enabling veterans to reconnect with other veterans with
9 whom they served, without disclosing personal contact in-
10 formation such as phone numbers, email addresses, phys-
11 ical addresses, or social media identifiers unless expressly
12 authorized by the veteran.

13 (b) CONTENT OF SYSTEM.—The Secretary shall en-
14 sure that the Vets Connect System includes only the min-
15 imum information necessary to facilitate service-based
16 matching between veterans, including—

17 (1) service-connection information, such as
18 branch of service, units, dates of service, deploy-
19 ments, occupational specialty, and rank;

20 (2) a display name selected by the veteran,
21 which need not contain the veteran’s legal name; and

22 (3) any additional information the veteran
23 elects to include for visibility within the System by
24 taking an affirmative, documented opt-in action exe-
25 cuted within the System.

1 (c) USE WITHIN DEPARTMENT.—Information con-
2 tained in the Vets Connect System may not be used by
3 the Department for any purpose other than operating, se-
4 curing, and overseeing the System.

5 (d) ACCESS LIMITED TO VERIFIED VETERANS.—Ex-
6 cept for access required by subsection (c), the Secretary
7 shall ensure that—

8 (1) access to the Vets Connect System is lim-
9 ited to individuals whose military service has been
10 verified by the Department of Veterans Affairs or
11 the Department of Defense; and

12 (2) no individual whose service has not been
13 verified may gain access.

14 (e) INFORMATION ABOUT VETERANS ONLY IF THEY
15 OPT IN.—The Secretary shall ensure that—

16 (1) no veteran appears in search results or is
17 discoverable by other users unless the veteran has
18 affirmatively opted in to participation in the System;
19 and

20 (2) no veteran's personal contact information is
21 stored in, displayed through, or retrievable from the
22 Vets Connect System, or disclosed through the mes-
23 saging platform within the System, except to the ex-
24 tent the veteran takes an affirmative, documented
25 opt-in action executed within the System.

1 (f) OPTIONS TO OPT-OUT.—The Secretary shall en-
2 sure that a veteran may at any time—

3 (1) change their visibility settings;
4 (2) restrict communications from some or all
5 other users;
6 (3) opt out of participation in the System; or
7 (4) delete any information the veteran has con-
8 tributed to the System.

9 (g) PROHIBITION ON COMMERCIAL SOLICITATION
10 AND DATA BROKERAGE.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—No veteran or other person
12 or entity may use information contained in or de-
13 rived from the Vets Connect System for—

14 (A) solicitation of legal, financial, or
15 claims-related services;

16 (B) advertising, marketing, or commercial
17 outreach; or

18 (C) any data-brokerage activity, including
19 the sale, transfer, licensing, or aggregation of
20 user information.

21 (2) CONTRACTORS, SUBCONTRACTORS, AND
22 THIRD PARTIES.—No contractor, subcontractor, or
23 third party may use System data for any purpose
24 other than performing duties under a contract with
25 the Department.

1 (h) SECURITY, AUDIT LOGS, AND OVERSIGHT.—

2 (1) SECURITY.—The Secretary shall implement
3 industry-standard cybersecurity protections, includ-
4 ing encryption, access controls, and monitoring, to
5 prevent unauthorized access, scraping, mass-mes-
6 saging, or harvesting of veteran data in the System.7 (2) AUDIT LOGS.—The Secretary shall maintain
8 system-level audit logs documenting all access, que-
9 ries, administrative actions, and communications
10 metadata (but not message content) for the purpose
11 of oversight.12 (3) OVERSIGHT.—The Inspector General of the
13 Department of Veterans Affairs shall have access to
14 such audit logs and may conduct periodic reviews of
15 compliance, security controls, and misuse prevention.16 (i) PENALTIES FOR MISUSE.—Any individual who
17 knowingly accesses, attempts to access, or uses informa-
18 tion in the Vets Connect System for a prohibited purpose
19 or otherwise violates this section shall be subject to such
20 penalties as the Secretary may prescribe by regulation and
21 any other penalties available under law, including section
22 5701 of title 38, United States Code, if applicable.23 (j) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this sec-
24 tion shall be construed to authorize the disclosure of any
25 record protected under section 5701 of title 38, United

1 States Code, or any other privacy or security law applica-
2 ble to the Department of Veterans Affairs.