



CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE
COST ESTIMATE

July 10, 2007

S. 479

Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act

*As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
on June 27, 2007*

S. 479 would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to develop and implement a comprehensive program to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans. This bill would require that the program have specific components, including training for all staff who interact with veterans, a suicide prevention counselor at each medical facility, outreach and education for veterans and their families, and a national campaign aimed at reducing the stigma of mental illness among veterans.

According to VA, most of those requirements are already in place or will be implemented before the end of the year. For example, training seminars have recently begun for all employees and peer-support groups are a regular facet of veterans' rehabilitation centers. Annual screenings for suicide risk factors such as depression and alcohol abuse are routinely performed by primary care physicians. Two medical centers are focused on research and education about suicide and its prevention. In addition, VA works with other medical providers in the community to reach veterans who may not use the VA health care system. VA also plans to hire suicide-prevention professionals at each of its hospitals. The bill would authorize VA to create a toll-free hotline staffed by mental health personnel, and the agency plans to have such a hotline in operation by the end of August 2007.

CBO estimates, therefore, that implementing this bill would have little, if any, cost because VA already has or soon will implement all the specific requirements of the bill. Enacting the bill would not affect direct spending or receipts.

S. 479 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would not affect the budgets of state, local, or tribal governments.

On March 19, 2007, CBO transmitted a cost estimate for H.R. 327, the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on March 15, 2007. The two versions of the legislation are similar, and their estimated costs are identical.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Michelle S. Patterson. This estimate was approved by Peter H. Fontaine, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.