

TESTIMONY OF JAMES P. MCGOVERN (MA-02)  
FISCAL YEAR 2025 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
April 11, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith, for giving me this opportunity to talk to you about one of my priorities for the FY 2025 National Defense Authorization Act.

The Wounded Warrior Service Dog Program was created as a \$1 million pilot program in the FY 2015 Defense Appropriations Bill and has seen consistent bipartisan support to increase funding to its current level of \$16 million in FY 2024.

I want to thank this Committee for recognizing the success of the program in 2020 by including the amendment I filed with Representative Jackie Walorski in a bipartisan en bloc amendment, which established the Wounded Warrior Service Dog Program as a program of record in the FY 2021 NDAA.

Regrettably, the program shifted its primary purpose in 2023. It's no longer a competitive grant program that provides resources for nonprofits to increase capacity to raise, train, and place service dogs with eligible veterans and service members. Instead, the primary goal is to research standards for raising service dogs. The new guidelines for organizations applying for funding do not even consider if the award would increase capacity to place service dogs with veterans.

As you well know, so many of our service members and veterans return home from the battlefield suffering from post-traumatic stress (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and other mental and physical disabilities.

Over the past decade, I've had the opportunity to spend time at the National Education for Assistance Dog Services – or NEADS – located in Princeton, Massachusetts. Like similar non-profits, NEADS customizes each dog's training to serve its future owner. Dogs can be trained to retrieve medicine from a refrigerator, turn the lights on and scan an empty house before the owner enters, guard an owner's back in a public setting, and even wake up an owner from a nightmare.

I've had countless conversations with constituents and other veterans around the country who tell me having a service dog on their support team has saved their lives. They tell me about how it helped them reintegrate into the social framework of their families and communities, and often reduces their reliance on prescription drugs.

Today, I'm here to ask the Committee to include the text of the bipartisan amendment to the NDAA I filed last year with Representatives Fitzpatrick, LaLota, D'Esposito, and Garbarino, that was included in the House-passed FY 2024 NDAA, and would clarify the congressional intent of establishing the Wounded Warrior Service Dog Program.

Rather than repurposing these resources, let's get back to supporting these highly technical non-profits so they can continue to do what they do best – help our veterans.

Thank you, Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith. I'm happy to hear any comments and take any questions you might have for me.