

Statement for the Record
Congressman Michael G. Grimm (NY11)
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health
Legislative Hearing
March 27, 2014

Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownley, thank you for allowing me to testify today on H.R. 183, the "Veterans Dog Training Therapy Act," a bill I introduced along with my friend the Ranking Member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Congressman Michaud. As a Marine Combat Veteran of Operation Desert Storm it is a unique honor for me to address this committee. Having seen firsthand both the physical and mental wounds of war that the members of our nation's military are faced with, I have a special appreciation for the important work this committee does every day.

Today, millions of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans have returned home to the challenge of a stagnant economy, high unemployment rate, and, for many, the long road to recovery from the mental and physical wounds sustained during their service.

During my time in Congress I have had the honor to meet with a number of our nation's veterans who are now faced with the challenges of coping with PTSD and physical disabilities resulting from their service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their stories are not for the weak of heart and are truly moving. It was these personal accounts of recovery, both physical and mental, and the important role therapy and service dogs played in that process, that inspired this legislation.

The Veterans Dog Training Therapy Act would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct a five-year pilot program in at least three but not more than five VA medical centers assessing the effectiveness of addressing post-deployment mental health and PTSD through the therapeutic medium of training service dogs for veterans with disabilities. These trained service dogs are then given to physically disabled veterans to help them with their daily activities. Simply put, this program treats veterans suffering from PTSD while at the same time aiding those suffering from physical disabilities. When I originally introduced this legislation in the 112th Congress both the House Veterans Affairs Committee and the full House of Representatives passed it with overwhelming bipartisan support.

Additionally, with high veteran suicide rates and more servicemen and women returning from deployment being diagnosed with PTSD, this bill meets a crucial need for additional treatment methods. I believe that by caring for our nation's veterans suffering from the hidden wounds of PTSD while at the same time providing assistance dogs to those with physical disabilities we create a win-win for everyone, which I believe is a goal we can all be proud to accomplish.

Working in conjunction with a number of Veteran Service Organizations, I have drafted updated language which mirrors changes made to this legislation in the 112th Congress, and I hope to work with the committee during markup of H.R. 183 to ensure this program provides our nations veterans with the highest quality care for both PTSD and physical disabilities, while maintaining my commitment to fiscal responsibility.

Again, I would like to thank the committee for holding today's hearing and I look forward to working with you to ensure that this program is included in your continuing efforts to guarantee that our nation's heroes have the best possible programs for treating PTSD and providing disability assistance.