

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2225

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on dog training therapy.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 28, 2017

Mr. STIVERS (for himself and Mr. WALZ) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on dog training therapy.

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 “Veterans Dog Training
5 Therapy Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PILOT PRO-**
7 **GRAM ON DOG TRAINING THERAPY.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than 120
9 days after the date of the enactment of the Act, the Sec-
10 retary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a pilot program

1 under which the Secretary shall enter into a contract with
2 one or more appropriate non-government entities for the
3 purpose of assessing the effectiveness of addressing post-
4 deployment mental health and post-traumatic stress dis-
5 order symptoms through a therapeutic medium of training
6 service dogs for veterans with disabilities. Such program
7 shall be carried out through the Center for Compassionate
8 Innovation of the Veterans Health Administration of the
9 Department of Veterans Affairs.

10 (b) DURATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—The pilot pro-
11 gram required by subsection (a) shall be carried out dur-
12 ing the five-year period beginning on the date of the com-
13 mencement of the pilot program.

14 (c) LOCATIONS OF PILOT PROGRAM.—In entering
15 into contracts for purposes of the pilot program, the Sec-
16 retary shall seek to enter into contracts with appropriate
17 non-government entities located in close proximity to at
18 least three but not more than five medical centers of the
19 Department.

20 (d) APPROPRIATE NON-GOVERNMENT ENTITIES.—
21 For purposes of the pilot program, an appropriate non-
22 government entity is an entity that is certified in the train-
23 ing and handling of service dogs.

24 (e) TRAINING AREA.—The Secretary shall provide to
25 a non-government entity with which the Secretary enters

1 into a contract under this section access to a training area
2 in a facility of the Department that would be appropriate
3 for use in educating veterans with mental health condi-
4 tions in the art and science of service dog training and
5 handling. Such training area shall—

6 (1) include a dedicated space that is suitable
7 for grooming and training dogs indoors;

8 (2) be wheelchair accessible;

9 (3) include classroom or lecture space;

10 (4) include office space for staff;

11 (5) include a suitable space for storing training
12 equipment;

13 (6) provide for periodic use of other training
14 areas for training the dogs with wheelchairs and
15 conducting other exercises;

16 (7) include outdoor exercise and toileting space
17 for dogs; and

18 (8) provide transportation for weekly field trips
19 to train dogs in other environments.

20 (f) DESIGN OF PILOT PROGRAM.—Each contract en-
21 tered into under subsection (a) shall provide that the non-
22 government entity shall—

23 (1) employ at least one person with clinical ex-
24 perience related to mental health;

1 (2) ensure that veterans participating in the
2 program receive training from certified service dog
3 training instructors;

4 (3) ensure that each service dog in training
5 participating in the pilot program is taught all es-
6 sential commands pertaining to service dog skills;

7 (4) ensure that the pilot program involves both
8 lecture of service dog training methodologies and
9 practical hands-on training and grooming of service
10 dogs; and

11 (5) ensure that the pilot program is designed
12 to—

13 (A) maximize the therapeutic benefits to
14 veterans participating in the program; and

15 (B) provide well-trained service dogs to
16 veterans with disabilities; and

17 (6) in hiring service dog training instructors to
18 carry out training under the pilot program, give a
19 preference to veterans who have successfully grad-
20 uated from post-traumatic stress disorder or other
21 residential treatment programs and who have re-
22 ceived adequate certification in service dog training.

23 (g) ADMINISTRATION.—In order to carry out the
24 pilot program under section (a), the Secretary of Veterans
25 Affairs shall—

1 (1) administer the program through the Center
2 for Compassionate Innovation of the Veterans
3 Health Administration of the Department in collabo-
4 ration with the Recreation Therapy Service of the
5 Department under the direction of a certified rec-
6 reational therapist with sufficient administrative ex-
7 perience to help oversee the pilot program; and

8 (2) establish a director of therapeutic service
9 dog training with a background working in social
10 services, experience in teaching others to train serv-
11 ice dogs in a vocational setting, and at least one
12 year of experience working with veterans or active
13 duty service members with post-traumatic stress dis-
14 order in a clinical setting.

15 (h) VETERAN ELIGIBILITY.—The Secretary shall se-
16 lect veterans for participation in the pilot program. A vet-
17 eran with post-traumatic stress disorder or other post-de-
18 ployment mental health condition may volunteer to partici-
19 pate in the pilot program, if the Secretary determines that
20 there are adequate program resources available for such
21 veteran at the pilot program site. Veterans may partici-
22 pate in the pilot program in conjunction with the com-
23 pensated work therapy program of the Department of Vet-
24 erans Affairs.

1 (i) COLLECTION OF DATA.—The Secretary shall col-
2 lect data on the pilot program required under subsection
3 (a) to determine how effective the program is for the vet-
4 erans participating in the program. Such data shall in-
5 clude data to determine how effectively the program as-
6 sists veterans in—

7 (1) reducing stigma associated with post-trau-
8 matic stress disorder or other post-deployment men-
9 tal health condition;

10 (2) improving emotional regulation;

11 (3) improving patience;

12 (4) instilling or re-establishing a sense of pur-
13 pose;

14 (5) providing an opportunity to help fellow vet-
15 erans;

16 (6) reintegrating into the community;

17 (7) exposing the dog to new environments and
18 in doing so, helping the veteran reduce social isola-
19 tion and withdrawal;

20 (8) building relationship skills, including par-
21 enting skills;

22 (9) relaxing the hyper-vigilant survival state;

23 (10) improving sleep patterns; and

24 (11) enabling veterans to decrease the use of
25 pain medication.

1 (j) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one year
2 after the date of the commencement of the pilot program
3 under subsection (a), and each year thereafter for the du-
4 ration of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit to
5 Congress a report on the pilot program. Each such report
6 shall include—

7 (1) the number of veterans participating in the
8 pilot program;

9 (2) a description of the services carried out
10 under the pilot program;

11 (3) the effects that participating in the pilot
12 program has on the following—

13 (A) symptoms of post-traumatic stress dis-
14 order and post-deployment adjustment difficul-
15 ties, including depression, maintenance of sobri-
16 ety, suicidal ideations, and homelessness;

17 (B) potentially relevant physiological mark-
18 ers that possibly relate to the interactions with
19 the service dogs;

20 (C) family dynamics;

21 (D) insomnia and pain management; and

22 (E) overall well-being; and

23 (4) the recommendations of the Secretary with
24 respect to the extension or expansion of the pilot
25 program.

1 (k) DEFINITION.—For the purposes of this section,
2 the term “service dog training instructor” means an in-
3 structor who provides the direct training of veterans with
4 post-traumatic stress disorder and other post-deployment
5 issues in the art and science of service dog training and
6 handling.

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