

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2327

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make grants to eligible organizations to provide service dogs to veterans with severe post-traumatic stress disorder, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 3, 2017

Mr. DESANTIS (for himself, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mr. BUTTERFIELD, Mr. BYRNE, Mr. DONOVAN, Mr. HENSARLING, Ms. NORTON, Mr. HURD, Mr. JONES, Mr. JOYCE of Ohio, Mr. LOBIONDO, Mr. LYNCH, Mr. NORCROSS, Ms. PINGREE, Mr. POLIS, Mr. THOMAS J. ROONEY of Florida, Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD, Mr. RYAN of Ohio, Mr. SABLAN, Ms. SÁNCHEZ, Mr. SESSIONS, Ms. SINEMA, Ms. STEFANIK, Ms. VELÁZQUEZ, Mrs. WAGNER, Mr. ZELDIN, Mr. COHEN, Mr. JODY B. HICE of Georgia, Mr. HASTINGS, Mr. KNIGHT, Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia, Mr. GALLEGO, Ms. SHEA-PORTER, Mr. BARTON, Mr. FRANKS of Arizona, Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN of Puerto Rico, Mr. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY of New York, Mr. RASKIN, Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas, Mr. CURBELO of Florida, Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York, Mr. POCAN, Mr. ROYCE of California, Mr. PALLONE, Mr. POE of Texas, Mr. RUTHERFORD, Mr. O’ROURKE, Ms. KAPTUR, Mr. TROTT, Mr. SCOTT of Virginia, Ms. TITUS, Mr. BRAT, Mrs. COMSTOCK, and Mr. WALKER) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make grants to eligible organizations to provide service dogs to veterans with severe post-traumatic stress disorder, 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 “Puppies Assisting
5 Wounded Servicemembers Act of 2017” or the “PAWS
6 Act of 2017”.

7 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

8 Congress makes the following findings:

9 (1) According to the analysis of veteran suicide
10 published by the Department of Veterans Affairs in
11 August 2016 and titled “Suicide Among Veterans
12 and Other Americans”—

13 (A) an average of 20 veterans died by sui-
14 cide each day in 2014;

15 (B) mental health disorders, including
16 major depression and other mood disorders,
17 have been associated with increased risk for sui-
18 cide;

19 (C) since 2001, the proportion of users of
20 the Veterans Health Administration with men-
21 tal health conditions or substance use disorders
22 has increased from approximately 27 percent in
23 2001 to more than 40 percent in 2014; and

24 (D) overall, suicide rates are highest
25 among patients with mental health and sub-

1 stance use disorder diagnoses who are in treat-
2 ment and lower among those who received a
3 mental health diagnoses but were not at risk
4 enough to require enhanced care from a mental
5 health provider.

6 (2) The Department of Veterans Affairs must
7 be more effective in its approach to reducing the
8 burden of veteran suicide connected to mental health
9 disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder,
10 and a pilot program and study to assess the benefits
11 of pairing service dogs with veterans suffering from
12 mental health disorders would allow the Department
13 to better determine the efficacy of using service dogs
14 as a nontraditional therapy to ensure the well-being
15 of veterans.

16 (3) Pairing a service dog with a veteran costs
17 approximately \$25,000, including with respect to
18 training of the service dog as well as training of the
19 veteran with the service dog.

1 **SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PILOT PRO-**
2 **GRAM TO PROVIDE GRANTS FOR THE PROVI-**
3 **SION OF SERVICE DOGS TO CERTAIN VET-**
4 **ERANS WITH SEVERE POST-TRAUMATIC**
5 **STRESS DISORDER.**

6 (a) GRANTS.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
7 shall carry out a pilot program under which the Secretary
8 provides a \$25,000 grant to an eligible organization for
9 each veteran referred to that organization for a service
10 dog pairing.

11 (b) BENEFITS PROVIDED.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—An organization that re-
13 ceives a grant under subsection (a) shall provide the
14 following for each service dog and veteran partici-
15 pating in the pilot program:

16 (A) Coverage of a commercially available
17 veterinary health insurance policy to maintain
18 the health of the dog and keep the dog func-
19 tioning in the prescribed role for the life of the
20 dog.

21 (B) Hardware, or repairs or replacements
22 for hardware, that are clinically determined to
23 be required by the dog to perform the tasks
24 necessary to assist the veteran with the diag-
25 nosed disorder of the veteran.

1 (C) Payments for travel expenses for the
2 veteran to obtain the dog, calculated in the
3 same manner as similar travel expenses pro-
4 vided pursuant to section 111 of title 38,
5 United States Code.

6 (2) OTHER TRAVEL EXPENSES.—If a veteran is
7 required to replace a service dog provided pursuant
8 to a grant under this section, the Secretary shall pay
9 for the travel expenses described in paragraph
10 (1)(C) required to obtain a new service dog pursuant
11 to subsection (c)(3), regardless of any other benefits
12 the veteran is receiving for the first service dog
13 under this section.

14 (c) ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATIONS.—To be eligible to re-
15 ceive a grant under this section, an organization shall—

16 (1) be a nonprofit organization that provides
17 trained service dogs—

18 (A) that—

19 (i) is certified by Assistance Dogs
20 International;

21 (ii) on average, provides one-on-one
22 training for each service dog and recipient
23 for 30 hours or more over 90 days or
24 more;

1 (iii) provides a wellness verification
2 from a licensed veterinarian for each serv-
3 ice dog;

4 (iv) provides an in-house residential
5 facility, or other accommodations nearby,
6 in which service dog recipients stay for a
7 minimum of 10 days while receiving at
8 least 30 hours of training with their new
9 service dog;

10 (v) ensures all service dogs pass the
11 American Kennel Club Community Canine
12 test and the ADI Public Access Test prior
13 to permanent placement with a recipient;
14 and

15 (vi) provides follow-up support service
16 for the life of the service dog, to include a
17 contact plan between the veteran and orga-
18 nization to allow—

19 (I) the veteran to reach out for
20 and receive adequate help with the
21 service dog; and

22 (II) the organization to commu-
23 nicate with the veteran to ensure that
24 the service dog is being properly cared
25 for; or

1 (B) that meets the Association of Service
2 Dog Providers for Military Veterans Service
3 Dog Agency Standards that cater to the unique
4 needs of veterans with post-traumatic stress
5 disorder;

6 (2) agree to cover all costs in excess of the
7 grant amount to guarantee the benefits listed under
8 subsection (b)(1);

9 (3) agree to reaccept or replace the service dog
10 the organization provided to the veteran, if nec-
11 essary, as determined by the organization and the
12 veteran; and

13 (4) submit to the Secretary an application con-
14 taining such information, certification, and assur-
15 ances as the Secretary may require.

16 (d) ELIGIBLE VETERANS.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
18 Affairs shall review and approve veterans eligible to
19 participate under this section and shall refer ap-
20 proved veterans to eligible organizations. The period
21 beginning on the date on which a veteran applies to
22 participate under this section and the date on which
23 the Secretary makes an approval determination may
24 not exceed 90 days.

1 (2) INITIAL ELIGIBILITY.—For purposes of this
2 section, an eligible veteran is a veteran who is en-
3 rolled in the patient enrollment system of the De-
4 partment of Veterans Affairs under section 1705 of
5 title 38, United States Code, and—

6 (A) has been treated and has completed an
7 established evidence-based treatment for post-
8 traumatic stress disorder yet remains diagnosed
9 with post-traumatic stress disorder by a quali-
10 fied health care provider as rated on the post-
11 traumatic stress disorder checklist (PCL-5);

12 (B) the health care provider or clinical
13 team of the Department of Veterans Affairs
14 that is treating the veteran for such disorder
15 determines based upon medical judgment that
16 the veteran may potentially benefit from a serv-
17 ice dog; and

18 (C) agrees to successfully complete train-
19 ing provided by an eligible organization pursu-
20 ant to subsection (e).

21 (3) ONGOING ELIGIBILITY.—To remain eligible
22 to participate in the pilot program, a veteran shall
23 see the health care provider or clinical team of the
24 Department of Veterans Affairs treating the veteran
25 for such a disorder at least every six months to de-

1 termine, based on a clinical evaluation of efficacy,
2 whether the veteran continues to benefit from a
3 service dog.

4 (4) OTHER CASES.—If at any point, the veteran
5 is no longer able or willing to care for the service
6 dog, the organization that provided the service dog
7 and the veteran shall determine the appropriate re-
8 course to ensure the safety of both the veteran and
9 the service dog.

10 (e) RELATIONSHIP TO DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS
11 AFFAIRS BENEFITS.—The provision of a service dog to
12 a veteran under this section is in addition to any other
13 hospital care or medical service furnished by the Depart-
14 ment for that veteran for post-traumatic stress disorder,
15 and an improvement in symptoms as a result of the provi-
16 sion of a service dog shall not affect the eligibility of the
17 veteran for any other benefit under the laws administered
18 by the Secretary.

19 (f) METRICS.—In carrying out this section, the Sec-
20 retary shall—

21 (1) develop metrics and other appropriate
22 means to measure, with respect to veterans partici-
23 pating in the pilot program, the improvement in psy-
24 chosocial function and therapeutic compliance of
25 such veterans and changes with respect to the de-

1 pendence on prescription narcotics and psychotropic
2 medication of such veterans; and

3 (2) establish processes to document and track
4 the progress of such veterans under the pilot pro-
5 gram in terms of the benefits and improvements
6 noted as a result of the pilot program.

7 (g) GAO BRIEFING AND STUDY.—

8 (1) BRIEFING.—Not later than one year after
9 the date on which the Secretary commences the pilot
10 program under subsection (a), the Comptroller Gen-
11 eral of the United States shall provide to the Com-
12 mittees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Rep-
13 resentatives and the Senate a briefing on the meth-
14 odology established for the pilot program.

15 (2) REPORT.—Not later than 270 days after
16 the date on which the pilot program terminates, the
17 Comptroller General shall submit to the committees
18 specified in paragraph (1) a report on the pilot pro-
19 gram. Such report shall include an evaluation of the
20 approach and methodology used for the pilot pro-
21 gram with respect to—

22 (A) helping veterans with severe post-trau-
23 matic stress disorder return to civilian life;

24 (B) relevant metrics, including reduction in
25 metrics such as reduction in scores under the

1 post-traumatic stress disorder checklist (PCL-
2 5), improvement in psychosocial function, and
3 therapeutic compliance; and

4 (C) reducing the dependence of partici-
5 pants on prescription narcotics and psycho-
6 tropic medication.

7 (h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
8 authorized to be appropriated for the period of fiscal year
9 2018 through fiscal year 2023, \$10,000,000 to carry out
10 the pilot program under this section.

11 (i) OFFSET.—The amounts otherwise authorized to
12 be appropriated for Department of Veterans Affairs Office
13 of Human Resources and Administration for the period
14 of fiscal year 2018 through fiscal year 2023 shall be re-
15 duced by \$10,000,000.

16 (j) TERMINATION.—The authority to carry out a pilot
17 program under this section shall terminate on the date
18 that is five years after the date of the enactment of this
19 Act. An eligible veteran in possession of a service dog fur-
20 nished under the pilot program as of the termination of
21 the pilot program may keep the service dog after the ter-
22 mination of the program for the life of the dog.

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