

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4305

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

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 12, 2019

Mr. STIVERS (for himself, Miss RICE of New York, Mr. RUTHERFORD, Ms. SHERRILL, Mr. DUNN, Mr. CISNEROS, Mr. WALTZ, Ms. SLOTKIN, Mr. ROY, and Mr. JOYCE of Ohio) 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 “Puppies Assisting
5 Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy Act” or
6 the “PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act”.

7 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

8 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) According to the analyses of veteran suicide
2 published by the Department of Veterans Affairs in
3 August 2016 and titled “Suicide Among Veterans
4 and Other Americans”, and in June 2018, titled
5 “VA National Suicide Date Report”—

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

8 (B) mental health disorders, including
9 major depression and other mood disorders,
10 have been associated with increased risk for sui-
11 cide;

12 (C) since 2001, the proportion of users of
13 the Veterans Health Administration with men-
14 tal health conditions or substance use disorders
15 has increased from approximately 27 percent in
16 2001 to more than 40 percent in 2014; and

17 (D) overall, suicide rates are highest
18 among patients with mental health and sub-
19 stance use disorder diagnoses who are in treat-
20 ment and lower among those who received a
21 mental health diagnosis but were not at risk
22 enough to require enhanced care from a mental
23 health provider.

24 (2) The Department of Veterans Affairs must
25 be more effective in its approach to reducing the

1 burden of veteran suicide connected to mental health
2 disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder
3 (in this section referred to as “PTSD”), and new,
4 rigorous scientific research provides persuasive
5 weight to the growing anecdotal evidence that serv-
6 ice dogs ameliorate the symptoms associated with
7 PTSD, and in particular, help prevent veteran sui-
8 cide.

9 (3) Several organizations have proven track
10 records of training service dogs for veterans with se-
11 vere PTSD and dramatically improving those vet-
12 erans’ quality of life, ability to re-enter society, and,
13 most importantly, their chances of survival.

14 **SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PILOT PRO-**
15 **GRAM ON DOG TRAINING THERAPY.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than 120
17 days after the date of the enactment of the Act, the Sec-
18 retary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a pilot program
19 under which the Secretary shall make grants to one or
20 more appropriate non-government entities for the purpose
21 of assessing the effectiveness of addressing post-deploy-
22 ment mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder (in
23 this section referred to as “PTSD”) symptoms through
24 a therapeutic medium of training service dogs for veterans
25 with disabilities.

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

5 (c) CONDITIONS ON RECEIPT OF GRANTS.—As a con-
6 dition of receiving a grant under this section, a non-gov-
7 ernment entity shall—

8 (1) submit to the Secretary certification that
9 the entity is an organization described in section
10 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986
11 that—

12 (A) provides service dogs to veterans with
13 PTSD; and

14 (B) is accredited by, or adheres to stand-
15 ards comparable to those of, an accrediting or-
16 ganization with demonstrated experience, na-
17 tional scope, and recognized leadership and ex-
18 pertise in the training of service dogs and edu-
19 cation in the use of service dogs;

20 (2) agree to cover all costs in excess of the
21 grant amount;

22 (3) agree to reaccept or replace the service dog
23 the organization provided to the veteran, if nec-
24 essary, as determined by the organization and the
25 veteran;

1 (4) provide a wellness certification from a li-
2 censed veterinarian for any dog participating in the
3 program;

4 (5) employ at least one person with clinical ex-
5 perience related to mental health;

6 (6) ensure that veterans participating in the
7 pilot program receive training from certified service
8 dog training instructors for a period of time deter-
9 mined appropriate by the organization and the Sec-
10 retary, including service skills to address or alleviate
11 symptoms unique to veterans' needs;

12 (7) agree to provide both lectures on service dog
13 training methodologies and practical hands-on train-
14 ing and grooming of service dogs;

15 (8) agree that in hiring service dog training in-
16 structors to carry out training under the pilot pro-
17 gram, the non-government entity will give a pref-
18 erence to veterans who have successfully graduated
19 from PTSD or other residential treatment program
20 and who have received adequate certification in serv-
21 ice dog training;

22 (9) agree not to use shock collars or prong col-
23 lars as training tools and to use positive reinforce-
24 ment training;

1 (10) agree that upon the conclusion of training
2 provided using the grant funds—

3 (A) the veteran who received the training
4 will keep the dog unless the veteran and the
5 veteran’s health provider decide it is not in the
6 best interest of the veteran;

7 (B) if the veteran does not opt to own the
8 dog, the entity will be responsible for caring for
9 and appropriately placing the dog;

10 (C) the Department of Veterans Affairs
11 will have no additional responsibility to provide
12 for any benefits under this section; and

13 (D) the Department of Veterans Affairs
14 will have no liability with respect to the dog;

15 (11) provide follow-up support service for the
16 life of the dog, including a contact plan between the
17 veteran and the entity to allow the veteran to reach
18 out for and receive adequate help with the service
19 dog and the organization to communicate with the
20 veteran to ensure the service dog is being properly
21 cared for; and

22 (12) submit to the Secretary an application
23 containing such information, certification, and assur-
24 ances as the Secretary may require.

25 (d) VETERAN ELIGIBILITY.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—For the purposes of this sec-
2 tion, an eligible veteran is a veteran who—

3 (A) is enrolled in the patient enrollment
4 system in the Department of Veterans Affairs
5 under section 1705 of title 38, United States
6 Code;

7 (B) has been recommended for the pilot
8 program under this section by a qualified health
9 care provider or clinical team based on the med-
10 ical judgment that the veteran may potentially
11 benefit from participating; and

12 (C) agrees to successfully complete train-
13 ing provided by an eligible organization that re-
14 ceives a grant under this section.

15 (2) RELATIONSHIP TO PARTICIPATION IN
16 OTHER PROGRAM.—Veterans may participate in the
17 pilot program in conjunction with the compensated
18 work therapy program of the Department of Vet-
19 erans Affairs.

20 (3) CONTINUING ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENT.—
21 To remain eligible to participate in the program, a
22 veteran shall see the health care provider or clinical
23 team of the Department of Veterans Affairs treating
24 the veteran for PTSD at least once every six months
25 to determine, based on a clinical evaluation of effi-

1 cacy, whether the veteran continues to benefit from
2 the program.

3 (e) COLLECTION OF DATA.—In carrying out this sec-
4 tion, the Secretary shall—

5 (1) develop metrics and other appropriate
6 means to measure, with respect to veterans partici-
7 pation in the program, the improvement in psycho-
8 social function and therapeutic compliance of such
9 veterans and changes with respect to the dependence
10 on prescription narcotics and psychotropic medica-
11 tion of such veterans;

12 (2) establish processes to document and track
13 the progress of such veterans under the program in
14 terms of the benefits and improvements noted as a
15 result of the program; and

16 (3) in addition, the Secretary shall continue to
17 collect these data over the course of five years for
18 each veteran who has continued with the dog he or
19 she has personally trained.

20 (f) GAO BRIEFING AND STUDY.—

21 (1) BRIEFING.—Not later than one year after
22 the date of the commencement of the pilot program
23 under subsection (a), the Comptroller General of the
24 United States shall provide to the Committees on
25 Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives

1 and the Senate a briefing on the methodology estab-
2 lished for the program.

3 (2) REPORT.—Not later than 270 days after
4 the date on which the program terminates, the
5 Comptroller General shall submit to the committees
6 specified in paragraph (1) a report on the program.
7 Such report shall include an evaluation of the ap-
8 proach and methodology used for the program with
9 respect to—

10 (A) helping veterans with severe PTSD re-
11 turn to civilian life;

12 (B) relevant metrics, including reduction in
13 metrics such as reduction in scores under the
14 PTSD check-list (PCL-5), improvement in psy-
15 chosocial function, and therapeutic compliance;
16 and

17 (C) reducing the dependence of partici-
18 pants on prescription narcotics and psycho-
19 tropic medication.

20 (g) DEFINITION.—For the purposes of this section,
21 the term “service dog training instructor” means an in-
22 structor who provides the direct training of veterans with
23 PTSD and other post-deployment issues in the art and
24 science of service dog training and handling.

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