

111TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. R. 3885

AN ACT

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,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Dog Training
3 Therapy Act”.

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

6 (a) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than 120
7 days after the date of the enactment of the Act, the Sec-
8 retary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a pilot program
9 for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of addressing
10 post-deployment mental health and post-traumatic stress
11 disorder symptoms through a therapeutic medium of
12 training service dogs for veterans with disabilities.

13 (b) DURATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—The pilot pro-
14 gram required by subsection (a) shall be carried out at
15 least three and not more than five Department of Veterans
16 Affairs medical centers during the five-year period begin-
17 ning on the date of the commencement of the pilot pro-
18 gram.

19 (c) LOCATIONS OF PILOT PROGRAM.—In selecting
20 medical centers for the pilot program required under sub-
21 section (a), the Secretary shall ensure that each medical
22 center selected provides a training area for educating vet-
23 erans with mental health conditions in the art and science
24 of assistance dog training and handling. Such training
25 area shall—

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

3 (2) be wheelchair accessible;

4 (3) include classroom or lecture space;

5 (4) include office space for staff;

6 (5) include a suitable space for storing training
7 equipment;

8 (6) provide for periodic use of other training
9 areas for training the dogs with wheelchairs and
10 conducting other exercises;

11 (7) include outdoor exercise and toileting space
12 for dogs; and

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

15 (d) DESIGN OF PILOT PROGRAM.—In carrying out
16 the pilot program under this section, the Secretary shall—

17 (1) administer the program through the Recre-
18 ation Therapy Service of the Department of Vet-
19 erans Affairs under the direction of a certified rec-
20 reational therapist with sufficient administrative ex-
21 perience to oversee all pilot program sites;

22 (2) establish, for purposes of overseeing the
23 training of dogs at medical centers selected for the
24 pilot program, a director of service dog training with
25 a background working in social services, experience

1 in teaching others to train service dogs in a voca-
2 tional setting, and at least one year of experience
3 working with veterans or active duty service mem-
4 bers with post-traumatic stress disorder in a clinical
5 setting;

6 (3) ensure that each pilot program site has cer-
7 tified dog trainers;

8 (4) ensure that each assistance dog used in the
9 program is purpose-bred for assistance dog work
10 and has adequate temperament and health clear-
11 ances;

12 (5) ensure that each assistance dog partici-
13 pating in the pilot program is taught 90 commands
14 pertaining to assistance dog skills;

15 (6) ensure that each assistance dog live at the
16 pilot program site or a volunteer foster home in the
17 vicinity of such site while receiving training;

18 (7) ensure that the pilot program involves both
19 lecture of assistance dog training methodologies and
20 practical hands-on training and grooming of assist-
21 ance dogs; and

22 (8) ensure that the pilot program is designed
23 to—

24 (A) maximize the therapeutic benefits to
25 veteran participating in the program; and

1 (B) provide well-trained assistance dogs to
2 veterans with disabilities.

3 (e) VETERAN ELIGIBILITY.—A veteran with post-
4 traumatic stress disorder or other post-deployment mental
5 health condition may volunteer to participate in the pilot
6 program under subsection (a) if the Secretary determines
7 that there are adequate program resources available for
8 such veteran at the pilot program site.

9 (f) HIRING PREFERENCE.—In hiring service dog
10 training instructors under the pilot program under sub-
11 section (a), the Secretary shall give a preference to vet-
12 erans who have successfully graduated from post-trau-
13 matic stress disorder or other residential treatment pro-
14 grams and who have received adequate certification in as-
15 sistance dog training.

16 (g) COLLECTION OF DATA.—The Secretary shall col-
17 lect data on the pilot program required under subsection
18 (a) to determine how effective the program is for the vet-
19 erans participating in the program. Such data shall in-
20 clude data to determine how effectively the program as-
21 sists veterans in—

22 (1) reducing stigma associated with post-trau-
23 matic stress disorder or other post-deployment men-
24 tal health condition;

25 (2) improving emotional regulation;

1 (3) improving patience;

2 (4) instilling or re-establishing a sense of pur-
3 pose;

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

6 (6) reintegrating into the community;

7 (7) exposing the dog to new environments and
8 in doing so, helping the veteran reduce social isola-
9 tion and withdrawal and increase their sense of safe-
10 ty;

11 (8) building relationship skills;

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

13 (10) improving sleep patterns; and

14 (11) enabling veterans to decrease the use of
15 pain medication.

16 (h) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one
17 year after the date of the commencement of the pilot pro-
18 gram under subsection (a), and each year thereafter for
19 the duration of the pilot program, the Secretary shall sub-
20 mit to Congress a report on the pilot program. Each such
21 report shall include—

22 (1) the number of veterans participating in the
23 pilot program;

24 (2) a description of the services carried out by
25 the Secretary under the pilot program;

1 (3) the effects that participating in the pilot
2 program has on the following—

3 (A) symptoms of post-traumatic stress dis-
4 order and post-deployment adjustment difficul-
5 ties, including depression, maintenance of sobri-
6 ety, suicidal ideations, and homelessness;

7 (B) potentially relevant physiological mark-
8 ers that possibly relate to the interactions with
9 the service dogs;

10 (C) family dynamics;

11 (D) insomnia and pain management; and

12 (E) overall well being; and

13 (4) the recommendations of the Secretary with
14 respect to the extension or expansion of the pilot
15 program.

16 (i) DEFINITION.—For the purposes of this section,
17 the term “service dog training instructor” means an in-
18 structor who provides the direct training of veterans with
19 post-traumatic stress disorder and other post-deployment

- 1 issues in the art and science of assistance dog training
- 2 and handling.

Passed the House of Representatives May 25, 2010.

Attest:

Clerk.

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