

111TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 3885

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

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IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OCTOBER 21, 2009

Mr. BROWN of South Carolina introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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## 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 for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of addressing  
2 post-deployment mental health and post-traumatic stress  
3 disorder symptoms through a therapeutic medium of  
4 training service dogs for veterans with disabilities.

5 (b) DURATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—The pilot pro-  
6 gram required by subsection (a) shall be carried out at  
7 least three and not more than five Department of Veterans  
8 Affairs medical centers during the five-year period begin-  
9 ning on the date of the commencement of the pilot pro-  
10 gram.

11 (c) LOCATIONS OF PILOT PROGRAM.—In selecting  
12 medical centers for the pilot program required under sub-  
13 section (a), the Secretary shall ensure that each medical  
14 center selected provides a training area for educating vet-  
15 erans with mental health conditions in the art and science  
16 of assistance dog training and handling. Such training  
17 area shall—

- 18 (1) include a dedicated space that is suitable  
19 for grooming and training dogs indoors;
- 20 (2) be wheelchair accessible;
- 21 (3) include classroom or lecture space;
- 22 (4) include office space for staff;
- 23 (5) include a suitable space for storing training  
24 equipment;

1           (6) provide for periodic use of other training  
2 areas for training the dogs with wheelchairs and  
3 conducting other exercises;

4           (7) include outdoor exercise and toileting space  
5 for dogs; and

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

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

10           (1) administer the program through the Recre-  
11 ation Therapy Service of the Department of Vet-  
12 erans Affairs under the direction of a certified rec-  
13 reational therapist with sufficient administrative ex-  
14 perience to oversee all pilot program sites;

15           (2) establish, for purposes of overseeing the  
16 training of dogs at medical centers selected for the  
17 pilot program, a director of service dog training with  
18 a background working in social services, experience  
19 in teaching others to train service dogs in a voca-  
20 tional setting, and at least one year of experience  
21 working with veterans or active duty service mem-  
22 bers with post-traumatic stress disorder in a clinical  
23 setting;

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

1           (4) ensure that each assistance dog used in the  
2 program is purpose-bred for assistance dog work  
3 and has adequate temperament and health clear-  
4 ances;

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

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

11           (7) ensure that the pilot program involves both  
12 lecture of assistance dog training methodologies and  
13 practical hands-on training and grooming of assist-  
14 ance dogs; and

15           (8) ensure that the pilot program is designed  
16 to—

17                   (A) maximize the therapeutic benefits to  
18 veteran participating in the program; and

19                   (B) provide well-trained assistance dogs to  
20 veterans with disabilities.

21           (e) VETERAN ELIGIBILITY.—A veteran with post-  
22 traumatic stress disorder or other post-deployment mental  
23 health condition may volunteer to participate in the pilot  
24 program under subsection (a) if the Secretary determines

1 that there are adequate program resources available for  
2 such veteran at the pilot program site.

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

10 (g) COLLECTION OF DATA.—The Secretary shall col-  
11 lect data on the pilot program required under subsection  
12 (a) to determine how effective the program is for the vet-  
13 erans participating in the program. Such data shall in-  
14 clude data to determine how effectively the program as-  
15 sists veterans in—

16 (1) reducing stigma associated with post-trau-  
17 matic stress disorder or other post-deployment men-  
18 tal health condition;

19 (2) improving emotional regulation;

20 (3) improving patience;

21 (4) instilling or re-establishing a sense of pur-  
22 pose;

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

25 (6) reintegrating into the community;

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

5           (8) building relationship skills;

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

7           (10) improving sleep patterns; and

8           (11) enabling veterans to decrease the use of  
9           pain medication.

10          (h) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one  
11          year after the date of the commencement of the pilot pro-  
12          gram under subsection (a), and each year thereafter for  
13          the duration of the pilot program, the Secretary shall sub-  
14          mit to Congress a report on the pilot program. Each such  
15          report shall include—

16                 (1) the number of veterans participating in the  
17                 pilot program;

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

20                 (3) the effects that participating in the pilot  
21                 program has on the following—

22                         (A) symptoms of post-traumatic stress dis-  
23                         order and post-deployment adjustment difficul-  
24                         ties, including depression, maintenance of sobri-  
25                         ety, suicidal ideations, and homelessness;

1 (B) potentially relevant physiological mark-  
2 ers that possibly relate to the interactions with  
3 the service dogs;

4 (C) family dynamics;

5 (D) insomnia and pain management; and

6 (E) overall well being; and

7 (4) the recommendations of the Secretary with  
8 respect to the extension or expansion of the pilot  
9 program.

10 (i) DEFINITION.—For the purposes of this section,  
11 the term “service dog training instructor” means an in-  
12 structor who provides the direct training of veterans with  
13 post-traumatic stress disorder and other post-deployment  
14 issues in the art and science of assistance dog training  
15 and handling.

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