

Union Calendar No. 278

111TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. R. 3885

[Report No. 111-490]

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

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

MAY 20, 2010

Additional sponsors: Mr. MICHAUD, Mr. MARKEY of Massachusetts, Mr.
KISSELL, Mr. RODRIGUEZ, Mr. MEEKS of New York, Mrs. BLACKBURN,
Mr. MINNICK, Ms. NORTON, Mr. COHEN, Mr. WOLF, Mr. KILDEE, and
Mr. ROONEY

MAY 20, 2010

Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union
and ordered to be printed

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
11 for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of addressing
12 post-deployment mental health and post-traumatic stress
13 disorder symptoms through a therapeutic medium of
14 training service dogs for veterans with disabilities.

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

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

1 of assistance dog training and handling. Such training
2 area shall—

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

5 (2) be wheelchair accessible;

6 (3) include classroom or lecture space;

7 (4) include office space for staff;

8 (5) include a suitable space for storing training
9 equipment;

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

13 (7) include outdoor exercise and toileting space
14 for dogs; and

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

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

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

24 (2) establish, for purposes of overseeing the
25 training of dogs at medical centers selected for the

1 pilot program, a director of service dog training with
2 a background working in social services, experience
3 in teaching others to train service dogs in a voca-
4 tional setting, and at least one year of experience
5 working with veterans or active duty service mem-
6 bers with post-traumatic stress disorder in a clinical
7 setting;

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

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

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

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

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

24 (8) ensure that the pilot program is designed
25 to—

1 (A) maximize the therapeutic benefits to
2 veteran participating in the program; and

3 (B) provide well-trained assistance dogs to
4 veterans with disabilities.

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

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

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

- 1 (1) reducing stigma associated with post-trau-
- 2 matic stress disorder or other post-deployment men-
- 3 tal health condition;
- 4 (2) improving emotional regulation;
- 5 (3) improving patience;
- 6 (4) instilling or re-establishing a sense of pur-
- 7 pose;
- 8 (5) providing an opportunity to help fellow vet-
- 9 erans;
- 10 (6) reintegrating into the community;
- 11 (7) exposing the dog to new environments and
- 12 in doing so, helping the veteran reduce social isola-
- 13 tion and withdrawal and increase their sense of safe-
- 14 ty;
- 15 (8) building relationship skills;
- 16 (9) relaxing the hyper-vigilant survival state;
- 17 (10) improving sleep patterns; and
- 18 (11) enabling veterans to decrease the use of
- 19 pain medication.
- 20 (h) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one
- 21 year after the date of the commencement of the pilot pro-
- 22 gram under subsection (a), and each year thereafter for
- 23 the duration of the pilot program, the Secretary shall sub-
- 24 mit to Congress a report on the pilot program. Each such
- 25 report shall include—

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

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

5 (3) the effects that participating in the pilot
6 program has on the following—

7 (A) symptoms of post-traumatic stress dis-
8 order and post-deployment adjustment difficul-
9 ties, including depression, maintenance of sobri-
10 ety, suicidal ideations, and homelessness;

11 (B) potentially relevant physiological mark-
12 ers that possibly relate to the interactions with
13 the service dogs;

14 (C) family dynamics;

15 (D) insomnia and pain management; and

16 (E) overall well being; and

17 (4) the recommendations of the Secretary with
18 respect to the extension or expansion of the pilot
19 program.

20 (i) 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 post-traumatic stress disorder and other post-deployment
24 issues in the art and science of assistance dog training
25 and handling.

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