

112TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 198

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

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 6, 2011

Mr. GRIMM (for himself, Mr. MICHAUD, Mr. KING of New York, and Mr. LANCE) 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 “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 service dog training and handling. Such training area
17 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 service dog training instructors;

1 (4) ensure that in selecting assistance dogs for
2 use in the program, dogs residing in animal shelters
3 or foster homes are looked at as an option, if appro-
4 priate, and ensure that all dogs used in the program
5 have adequate temperament and health clearances;

6 (5) ensure that each service dog in training
7 participating in the pilot program is taught all es-
8 sential commands pertaining to service dog skills;

9 (6) ensure that each service dog in training
10 lives at the pilot program site or a volunteer foster
11 home in the vicinity of such site while receiving
12 training;

13 (7) ensure that the pilot program involves both
14 lecture of service dog training methodologies and
15 practical hands-on training and grooming of service
16 dogs; and

17 (8) ensure that the pilot program is designed
18 to—

19 (A) maximize the therapeutic benefits to
20 veterans participating in the program; and

21 (B) provide well-trained service dogs to
22 veterans with disabilities.

23 (e) VETERAN ELIGIBILITY.—A veteran with post-
24 traumatic stress disorder or other post-deployment mental
25 health condition may volunteer to participate in the pilot

1 program under subsection (a) if the Secretary determines
2 that there are adequate program resources available for
3 such veteran at the pilot program site. Veterans may par-
4 ticipate in the pilot program in conjunction with the com-
5 pensated work therapy program of the Department of Vet-
6 erans Affairs.

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

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

- 20 (1) reducing stigma associated with post-trau-
21 matic stress disorder or other post-deployment men-
22 tal health condition;
- 23 (2) improving emotional regulation;
- 24 (3) improving patience;

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

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

5 (6) reintegrating into the community;

6 (7) exposing the dog to new environments and
7 in doing so, helping the veteran reduce social isola-
8 tion and withdrawal;

9 (8) building relationship skills, including par-
10 enting skills;

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

12 (10) improving sleep patterns; and

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

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

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

23 (2) a description of the services carried out by
24 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
20 issues in the art and science of service dog training and
21 handling.

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