

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 6170

To direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to carry out a pilot program to study the efficacy of dog-assisted therapy on vulnerable populations, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 10, 2020

Mr. LIPINSKI introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on Energy and Commerce

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to carry out a pilot program to study the efficacy of dog-assisted therapy on vulnerable populations, and for other purposes.

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 “Dogs Offering Gentle
5 Support Act” or the “DOGS Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) Medical research has demonstrated mental,
2 emotional, and cognitive benefits of dog-assisted
3 therapy in various populations.

4 (2) Vulnerable populations, such as children
5 with low reading comprehension, elderly nursing
6 home residents and veterans suffering from post-
7 traumatic stress disorder, can see particularly strong
8 benefits from dog-assisted therapy.

9 (3) Congress should support this growing body
10 of research by deploying Federal agency resources to
11 determine the ways in which dog-assisted therapy
12 can be most beneficial.

13 (4) Findings from the pilot program established
14 under this Act can be instructive to State and local
15 governments, non-profit organizations and other en-
16 tities seeking to make use of dog-assisted therapy.

17 **SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

18 **PILOT PROGRAM ON DOG-ASSISTED THER-**

19 **APY.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than 120
21 days after the date of the enactment of the Act, subject
22 to the availability of appropriations, the Secretary of
23 Health and Human Services shall carry out a pilot pro-
24 gram under which the Secretary shall make grants to ap-
25 propriate non-government entities for the purpose of con-

1 ducting routine dog-assisted therapy in various community
2 settings and populations. In addition to the eligibility cri-
3 teria in subsection (e), the Secretary may impose addi-
4 tional eligibility criteria necessary for the effective func-
5 tioning of the pilot program.

6 (b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this program is to
7 add to the growing body of research on the effectiveness
8 of dog-assisted therapy in various settings and among var-
9 ious populations, and to encourage the broader adoption
10 of dog-assisted therapy in settings and among populations
11 where such therapy offers proven benefits.

12 (c) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
13 gress that vulnerable populations should be prioritized in
14 grant awards from the Secretary to eligible entities. Such
15 populations may include, but are not limited to, patients
16 in nursing or assisted-living facilities, children with intel-
17 lectual and developmental disabilities in academic settings,
18 and veterans seeking care in State or Federal veterans'
19 facilities.

20 (d) DURATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—The pilot pro-
21 gram required by subsection (a) shall be carried out dur-
22 ing the 3-year period beginning on the date of the com-
23 mencement of the pilot program.

1 (e) ELIGIBILITY AND CONDITIONS ON RECEIPT OF
2 GRANTS.—As a condition of receiving a grant under this
3 section, a non-government entity shall—

4 (1) submit to the Secretary certification that
5 the entity is an organization described in section
6 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 that
7 visits community settings with dogs for the purposes
8 of providing dog-assisted therapy;

9 (2) ensure that dogs making therapy visits are
10 certified by a therapy dog certification with dem-
11 onstrated experience, national scope, and recognized
12 leadership and expertise in the training of therapy
13 dogs and their handlers;

14 (3) agree to cover all costs in excess of the
15 grant amount;

16 (4) agree to a minimum number of routine vis-
17 its to a community setting, as determined by the
18 Secretary to ensure meaningful impact on those
19 present in the setting;

20 (5) ensure that any training of dogs does not
21 involve abusive methods such as shock collars, and
22 instead uses positive reinforcement training;

23 (6) provide a wellness certification from a li-
24 censed veterinarian for any dog making a therapy
25 visit under this program; and

1 (7) submit to the Secretary an application con-
2 taining such information, certification, and assur-
3 ances as the Secretary may require.

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

6 (1) develop metrics and other appropriate
7 means to measure the impact of routine dog-assisted
8 therapy on the populations visited by non-govern-
9 ment organizations approved under subsection (e);
10 and

11 (2) establish processes to document and track
12 the progress of populations under the program in
13 terms of the benefits and improvements noted as a
14 result of the program.

15 (g) GAO BRIEFING AND STUDY.—

16 (1) BRIEFING.—Not later than 1 year after the
17 date of the commencement of the pilot program
18 under subsection (a), the Comptroller General of the
19 United States shall provide to the Committee on En-
20 ergy and Commerce of the House of Representatives
21 and to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
22 and Pensions of the Senate a briefing on the meth-
23 odology established for the program.

24 (2) REPORT.—Not later than 270 days after
25 the date on which the program terminates, the

1 Comptroller General shall submit to the committees
2 specified in paragraph (1) a report on the program.
3 Such report shall include an evaluation of the ap-
4 proach and methodology used for the program with
5 respect to—

6 (A) helping vulnerable populations over-
7 come emotional or cognitive challenges; and

8 (B) relevant metrics, including those devel-
9 oped by the Secretary under paragraph (1) of
10 subsection (f).

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