

112TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1838

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on service dog training therapy, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

NOVEMBER 9, 2011

Mr. BAUCUS (for himself, Mr. BOOZMAN, and Mr. PRYOR) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on service dog training therapy, 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. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PILOT**
4 **PROGRAM ON SERVICE DOG TRAINING.**

5 (a) PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.—Not later than 120
6 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
7 retary of Veterans Affairs shall commence a pilot program
8 to assess the feasibility and advisability of using service
9 dog training activities as components of integrated post-

1 deployment mental health and post-traumatic stress dis-
2 order rehabilitation programs at Department of Veterans
3 Affairs medical centers—

4 (1) to positively affect veterans with post-de-
5 ployment mental health conditions or post-traumatic
6 stress disorder symptoms; and

7 (2) to produce specially trained service dogs for
8 veterans.

9 (b) DURATION.—The Secretary shall carry out the
10 pilot program during the three-year period beginning on
11 the date of the commencement of the pilot program.

12 (c) LOCATION.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—The pilot program shall be
14 carried out at one Department of Veterans Affairs
15 medical center selected by the Secretary for such
16 purpose other than in the Department of Veterans
17 Affairs Palo Alto health care system in Palo Alto,
18 California. In selecting medical centers for the pilot
19 program, the Secretary shall—

20 (A) ensure that the medical center se-
21 lected—

22 (i) has an established mental health
23 rehabilitation program that includes a clin-
24 ical focus on rehabilitation treatment of

1 post-deployment mental health disorder
2 and post-traumatic stress disorder; and

3 (ii) has a demonstrated capability and
4 capacity to incorporate service dog training
5 activities into the rehabilitation program;
6 and

7 (B) shall review and consider using rec-
8 ommendations published by experienced service
9 dog trainers regulations in the art and science
10 of basic third-party dog training and owner-
11 training dogs with regard to space, equipment,
12 and methodologies.

13 (2) PARTICIPATION OF RURAL VETERANS.—In
14 selecting a medical center for the pilot program re-
15 quired under subsection (a), the Secretary shall give
16 special consideration to Department of Veterans Af-
17 fairs medical centers that are located in States that
18 the Secretary considers rural or highly rural.

19 (d) DESIGN OF PILOT PROGRAM.—In carrying out
20 the pilot program, the Secretary shall—

21 (1) administer the program through the De-
22 partment of Veterans Affairs Patient Care Services
23 Office as a collaborative effort between the Rehabili-
24 tation Office and the Office of Mental Health Serv-
25 ices;

1 (2) ensure that the national pilot program lead
2 of the Patient Care Services Office has sufficient ad-
3 ministrative experience to oversee the pilot program
4 site;

5 (3) ensure that dogs selected are healthy and
6 age- and temperament-appropriate for use in the
7 pilot program;

8 (4) consider dogs residing in animal shelters or
9 foster homes for participation in the program if such
10 dogs meet the service dog candidate selection under
11 this subsection;

12 (5) ensure that each dog selected for the pilot
13 program—

14 (A) is taught all basic commands and be-
15 haviors;

16 (B) undergoes public access training; and

17 (C) receives training specifically tailored to
18 address the mental health conditions or disabil-
19 ities of the veteran with whom the dog is
20 paired;

21 (6) provide professional support for all training
22 under the pilot program; and

23 (7) provide or refer participants to business
24 courses for managing a service dog training busi-
25 ness.

1 (e) VETERAN PARTICIPATION.—Veterans diagnosed
2 with post-traumatic stress disorder or another post-de-
3 ployment mental health condition may volunteer to partici-
4 pate in the pilot program.

5 (f) HIRING PREFERENCE.—In hiring service dog
6 training instructors for the pilot program, the Secretary
7 shall give a preference to veterans who have a post-trau-
8 matic stress disorder or other mental health condition.

9 (g) COLLECTION OF DATA.—

10 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall collect
11 data on the pilot program to determine the effective-
12 ness of the pilot program in positively affecting vet-
13 erans with post-traumatic stress disorder or other
14 post-deployment mental health condition symptoms
15 and the feasibility and advisability of expanding the
16 pilot program to additional Department of Veterans
17 Affairs medical centers.

18 (2) MANNER OF COLLECTION.—Data described
19 in paragraph (1) shall be collected and analyzed
20 using a scientific peer-reviewed system, valid and re-
21 liable results-based research methodologies, and in-
22 struments.

23 (h) REPORTS.—

24 (1) ANNUAL REPORTS.—

1 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
2 after the date of the commencement of the pilot
3 program and annually thereafter for the dura-
4 tion of the pilot program, the Secretary shall
5 submit to Congress a report on the pilot pro-
6 gram.

7 (B) ELEMENTS.—Each such report re-
8 quired by subparagraph (A) shall include the
9 following:

10 (i) The number of veterans partici-
11 pating in the pilot program.

12 (ii) A description of the services car-
13 ried out by the Secretary under the pilot
14 program.

15 (iii) The effects that participating in
16 the pilot program has on veterans with
17 post-traumatic stress disorder and post-de-
18 ployment adjustment symptoms.

19 (2) FINAL REPORT.—At the conclusion of the
20 pilot program, the Secretary shall submit to Con-
21 gress a final report that includes recommendations
22 with respect to the feasibility and advisability of ex-
23 tending or expanding the pilot program.

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