

114TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 4764

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide service dogs to certain veterans with severe post-traumatic stress disorder.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 16, 2016

Mr. DESANTIS (for himself, Mr. ROONEY of Florida, Mr. ROTHFUS, Ms. STEFANIK, Mr. NUGENT, Mr. WEBER of Texas, Mrs. ELLMERS of North Carolina, Mr. MEADOWS, Mr. BYRNE, Mr. BISHOP of Michigan, Mr. FLORES, Ms. MCSALLY, Mr. JOLLY, Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia, Mr. SALMON, Ms. GABBARD, and Ms. SINEMA) 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 to provide service dogs to certain veterans with severe post-traumatic stress disorder.

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 “Puppies Assisting
5 Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) Act of 2016”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) An estimated 14 percent of members of the
2 Armed Forces returning from active duty service in
3 support of Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation
4 Enduring Freedom suffer from post-traumatic stress
5 disorder.

6 (2) The resulting hyperstimulation of the fight-
7 flight-freeze response associated with post-traumatic
8 stress disorder poses a threat to the successful soci-
9 etal reintegration of such members of the Armed
10 Forces.

11 (3) Animals such as dogs can buffer this stress
12 response when humans fail to provide social support.

13 (4) Interaction with dogs has been shown to
14 modulate symptoms of post-traumatic stress dis-
15 order, such as anxiety, including fear response and
16 hyperarousal, interpersonal difficulties, social isola-
17 tion, physical pain, and sleep disturbances.

18 **SEC. 3. PILOT PROGRAM ON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS**
19 **AFFAIRS PROVISION OF SERVICE DOGS TO**
20 **CERTAIN VETERANS WITH SEVERE POST-**
21 **TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER.**

22 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
23 fairs, acting through the Office of Patient Centered Care
24 and Cultural Transformation, shall carry out a pilot pro-
25 gram under which the Secretary shall provide to eligible

1 veterans with service dogs. The provision of a service dog
2 under the pilot program shall be done in addition to other
3 types of treatment provided for post-traumatic stress dis-
4 order and shall not replace established treatment modali-
5 ties. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall furnish vet-
6 erinary health insurance for each dog provided under the
7 pilot program.

8 (b) ELIGIBILITY.—

9 (1) INITIAL ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible for a
10 service dog under the pilot program a veteran
11 shall—

12 (A) be diagnosed with post-traumatic
13 stress disorder rated at a severity level of three
14 or four on the Clinician-Administered PTSD
15 Scale for DSM–5 (CAPS–5);

16 (B) have been treated and have completed
17 an established evidence-based treatment and re-
18 main significantly symptomatic, as evidenced by
19 the Global Assessment of Functioning or a
20 similar clinical metric;

21 (C) have served on active duty in the
22 Armed Forces on or after September 11, 2001;
23 and

24 (D) have not experienced satisfactory im-
25 provement in post-traumatic stress disorder

1 symptoms after being treated with established
2 evidence-based therapies.

3 (2) ONGOING ELIGIBILITY.—To remain eligible
4 to receive canine health insurance furnished by the
5 Department of Veterans Affairs, a veteran shall see
6 a physician who is a primary care provider or mental
7 health care provider at a Department of Veterans
8 Affairs medical facility at least quarterly.

9 (c) CONTRACT AUTHORITY.—

10 (1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the pilot
11 program under this section, the Secretary shall enter
12 into such contracts as may be necessary for the pro-
13 curement and training of service dogs with appro-
14 priate providers that are certified by Assistance
15 Dogs International or a similar organization that—

16 (A) on average, provides one-on-one train-
17 ing for each service canine for a minimum of 30
18 hours over at least 90 days including a wellness
19 verification from a licensed veterinarian;

20 (B) provides an in-house residential facility
21 in which service dog recipients stay for a min-
22 imum of ten days while receiving at least 30
23 hours of training with their new service canine;

24 (C) ensures all service canines pass the
25 American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen

1 test prior to permanent placement with a recipi-
2 ent; and

3 (D) provides follow-up support service for
4 the life of the service canine.

5 (2) LIMITATION.—The Secretary may not obli-
6 gate or expend more than \$27,000 for the procure-
7 ment and training of any dog under a contract en-
8 tered into under this subsection.

9 (d) GAO STUDY.—Not later than 180 days after the
10 termination of the pilot program under this section, the
11 Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to
12 Congress a report on the pilot program. Such report shall
13 include—

14 (1) an evaluation of the effectiveness of the
15 pilot program with respect to—

16 (A) helping veterans with severe post-trau-
17 matic stress disorder live normally;

18 (B) relevant metrics, including reduction in
19 metrics such as reduction in scores under the
20 post-traumatic stress disorder checklist (PCL),
21 improvement in psychosocial function, and
22 therapeutic compliance;

23 (C) lessening the symptoms of post-trau-
24 matic stress disorder; and

1 (D) reducing the dependence of partici-
2 pants on prescription narcotics and psycho-
3 tropic medication; and

4 (2) the recommendations of the Comptroller
5 General with respect to the continuation or expan-
6 sion of the program.

7 (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
8 authorized to be appropriated for each of fiscal years 2017
9 through 2022 \$10,000,000 to carry out the pilot program
10 under this section.

11 (f) OFFSET.—The amounts otherwise authorized to
12 be appropriated for Department of Veterans Affairs Office
13 of Human Resources and Administration for each of fiscal
14 years 2017 through 2022 shall be reduced by
15 \$10,000,000.

16 (g) TERMINATION.—The authority to carry out a
17 pilot program under this section shall terminate on the
18 date that is five years after the date of the enactment of
19 this Act.

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