

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1448

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 13, 2021

Received; read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

AN ACT

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on dog training therapy, and to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide service dogs to veterans with mental illnesses who do not have mobility impairments.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Puppies Assisting
3 Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy Act” or
4 the “PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PILOT PRO-**
6 **GRAM ON DOG TRAINING THERAPY.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the
8 date of the enactment of the Act, the Secretary of Vet-
9 erans Affairs shall commence the conduct of a pilot pro-
10 gram to provide canine training to eligible veterans diag-
11 nosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (in this section
12 referred to as “PTSD”) as an element of a complementary
13 and integrative health program for such veterans.

14 (b) DURATION; MEDICAL CENTERS.—

15 (1) DURATION.—The Secretary shall carry out
16 the pilot program under subsection (a) for a 5-year
17 period beginning on the date of the commencement
18 of the pilot program.

19 (2) MEDICAL CENTERS.—The Secretary shall
20 ensure that such pilot program is carried out by not
21 fewer than five medical centers of the Department of
22 Veterans Affairs located in geographically diverse
23 areas.

24 (c) AGREEMENTS WITH ENTITIES.—In carrying out
25 the pilot program under subsection (a), the Secretary shall
26 seek to enter into agreements with nongovernmental enti-

1 ties that the Secretary determines have the demonstrated
2 ability to provide the canine training specified in sub-
3 section (a).

4 (d) REQUIRED CONDITIONS.—The Secretary shall in-
5 clude in any agreement under subsection (c) conditions re-
6 quiring that the nongovernmental entity seeking to enter
7 into the agreement—

8 (1) submits to the Secretary certification that
9 the entity is an accredited service dog training orga-
10 nization;

11 (2) agrees to ensure that veterans participating
12 in the pilot program under subsection (a) receive
13 training from certified service dog training instruc-
14 tors for a period of time determined appropriate by
15 the entity;

16 (3) agrees to ensure that veterans participating
17 in such pilot program are prohibited from having ac-
18 cess to a dog under such pilot program at any time
19 during such participation without the supervision of
20 a certified service dog training instructor;

21 (4) agrees to ensure that veterans participating
22 in such pilot program receive training in skills
23 unique to the needs of the veteran to address or al-
24 leviate PTSD symptoms of the veteran;

1 (5) agrees not to use shock collars or prong col-
2 lars as training tools and to use positive reinforce-
3 ment training; and

4 (6) agrees to provide any follow-up training
5 support specified in subsection (e)(2), as applicable.

6 (e) ADOPTION OF DOG.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—A veteran who has partici-
8 pated in the pilot program under subsection (a) may
9 adopt a dog that the veteran assisted in training
10 during such pilot program if the veteran and the vet-
11 eran’s health provider (in consultation with the enti-
12 ty that provided the canine training with respect to
13 the dog under such pilot program) determine that it
14 is in the best interest of the veteran.

15 (2) FOLLOW-UP TRAINING SUPPORT.—If a vet-
16 eran adopts a dog under paragraph (1), the entity
17 that provided the canine training with respect to the
18 dog under the pilot program shall provide follow-up
19 training support for the life of the dog. Such sup-
20 port shall include the provision of a contact plan be-
21 tween the veteran and the entity that enables the
22 veteran to seek and receive assistance from the enti-
23 ty to ensure the dog is being properly cared for.

24 (f) ELIGIBILITY FOR OTHER CARE AND TREAT-
25 MENT.—Participation in the pilot program under sub-

1 section (a) may not preclude a veteran from receiving any
2 other medical care or treatment for PTSD furnished by
3 the Department, including therapy, for which the veteran
4 is otherwise eligible.

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

7 (1) develop metrics and other appropriate
8 means to measure, with respect to veterans partici-
9 pating in the pilot program under subsection (a)—

10 (A) the number of such veterans partici-
11 pating;

12 (B) the satisfaction of such veterans with
13 the pilot program;

14 (C) whether participation in the pilot pro-
15 gram resulted in any clinically relevant improve-
16 ments for such veterans, as determined by the
17 health care provider or clinical team that re-
18 ferred the veteran to participate in the pilot
19 program; and

20 (D) such other factors as the Secretary
21 may determine appropriate; and

22 (2) establish processes to document and track
23 the progress of such veterans under the pilot pro-
24 gram with respect to health benefits and improve-
25 ments.

1 (h) REPORT BY SECRETARY.—Not later than 1 year
2 before the date on which the pilot program under sub-
3 section (a) terminates, the Secretary shall submit to the
4 Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Rep-
5 resentatives and the Senate a report containing the rec-
6 ommendations of the Secretary regarding—

7 (1) whether to extend or make permanent the
8 pilot program; and

9 (2) the feasibility and advisability of expanding
10 the pilot program to address mental health condi-
11 tions other than PTSD.

12 (i) GAO BRIEFING AND STUDY.—

13 (1) BRIEFING.—Not later than 1 year after the
14 date of the commencement of the pilot program
15 under subsection (a), the Comptroller General of the
16 United States shall provide to the Committees on
17 Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives
18 and the Senate a briefing on the methodology estab-
19 lished for the pilot program.

20 (2) REPORT.—Not later than 270 days after
21 the date on which the pilot program terminates, the
22 Comptroller General shall submit to the committees
23 specified in paragraph (1) a report on the pilot pro-
24 gram. Such report shall include an evaluation of the

1 approach and methodology used for the pilot pro-
2 gram with respect to—

3 (A) assisting veterans with PTSD; and

4 (B) measuring relevant metrics, such as
5 reduction in scores under the Clinician Admin-
6 istered PTSD Scale (CAPS), improvement in
7 psychosocial function, and therapeutic compli-
8 ance.

9 (j) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

10 (1) The term “accredited service dog training
11 organization” means an organization described in
12 section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of
13 1986 that—

14 (A) provides service dogs to veterans with
15 PTSD; and

16 (B) is accredited by an accrediting organi-
17 zation with demonstrated experience, national
18 scope, and recognized leadership and expertise
19 in the training of service dogs and education in
20 the use of service dogs (as determined by the
21 Secretary).

22 (2) The term “eligible veteran” means a vet-
23 eran who—

24 (A) is enrolled in the patient enrollment
25 system in the Department of Veterans Affairs

1 under section 1705 of title 38, United States
2 Code; and

3 (B) has been recommended for participa-
4 tion in the pilot program under subsection (a)
5 by a qualified mental health care provider or
6 clinical team based on medical judgment that
7 the veteran may benefit from such participation
8 with respect to the diagnosed PTSD of the vet-
9 eran.

10 (3) The term “service dog training instructor”
11 means an instructor who provides the direct training
12 of veterans with PTSD in the art and science of
13 service dog training and handling.

14 **SEC. 3. PROVISION OF SERVICE DOGS AND VETERINARY IN-**
15 **SURANCE BENEFITS TO VETERANS WITH**
16 **POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER WHO**
17 **DO NOT HAVE CERTAIN IMPAIRMENTS.**

18 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1714 of title 38, United
19 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
20 lowing new subsections:

21 “(e) The Secretary may provide a service dog to a
22 veteran under subsection (c)(3) regardless of whether the
23 veteran has a mobility impairment.

24 “(f)(1) The Secretary shall provide to any veteran de-
25 scribed in paragraph (2) a commercially available veteri-

1 nary insurance policy for each dog provided to such vet-
2 eran under subsection (b) or (c).

3 “(2) A veteran described in this paragraph is a vet-
4 eran who—

5 “(A) is diagnosed with post-traumatic stress
6 disorder or a visual, hearing, or substantial mobility
7 impairment;

8 “(B) has received a dog under subsection (b) or
9 (c) in connection with such disorder or impairment;
10 and

11 “(C) meets such other requirements as the Sec-
12 retary may prescribe.”.

13 (b) APPLICABILITY.—Section 1714(f) of title 38,
14 United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall
15 apply with respect to a veteran provided a dog by the Sec-
16 retary of Veterans Affairs on or after the date of the en-
17 actment of this Act.

Passed the House of Representatives May 12, 2021.

Attest: CHERYL L. JOHNSON,
Clerk.