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SENATE

{ REPORT
119–113

SAVES ACT OF 2025

FEBRUARY 24, 2026.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. MORAN, from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 1441]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to which was referred the bill (S. 1441) to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to award grants to nonprofit entities to assist such entities in carrying out programs to provide service dogs to eligible veterans, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment in the nature of a substitute and recommends that the bill, as amended, do pass.

INTRODUCTION

On April 10, 2025, Senator Thom Tillis from North Carolina introduced S. 1441, the Service Dogs Assisting Veterans (SAVES) Act of 2025. Senators Richard Blumenthal from Connecticut, Elissa Slotkin from Michigan, Angus King from Maine, John Cornyn from Texas, Dick Durbin from Illinois, Kevin Cramer from North Dakota, Jacky Rosen from Nevada, and Jeanne Shaheen from New Hampshire are original cosponsors of the bill. Senators Charles Schumer from New York, Ted Budd from North Carolina, Ben Ray Lujan from New Mexico, Alex Padilla from California, Cory Booker from New Jersey, Martin Heinrich from New Mexico, Mazie Hirono from Hawaii, Chris Coons from Delaware, Adam Schiff from California, Catherine Cortez Masto from Nevada, Tammy Baldwin from Wisconsin, Maggie Hassan from New Hampshire, Angela Alsobrooks from Maryland, Tammy Duckworth from Illinois, Shelley Capito from West Virginia, and Jon Husted from Ohio were later added as cosponsors to the bill. The bill was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs (hereinafter "Committee").

COMMITTEE HEARINGS

On May 21, 2025, the Committee held a hearing on legislation pending before the Committee, including S. 1441. Testimony was received from: Thomas O'Toole, MD, Acting Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services at the Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director, Paralyzed Veterans of America; Brian Dempsey, Director of Government Affairs, Wounded Warrior Project; and Jon Retzer, Deputy National Legislative Director of Health, Disabled American Veterans.

COMMITTEE MEETING

After reviewing the testimony from the foregoing hearing, the Committee met in open session on July 30, 2025, to consider the Committee Print to S. 1441. The Committee, by a voice vote, voted to favorably report S. 1441, as amended, en bloc with other measures, to the Senate.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMITTEE BILL AS REPORTED

S. 1441, as reported (hereinafter, “the Committee bill”), consists of two sections, summarized below.

Section 1 provides the short title of the bill, the Service Dogs Assisting Veterans (SAVES) Act of 2025.

Section 2 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to award grants for the provision of service dogs to veterans.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Sec. 2. Department of Veterans Affairs pilot program to award grants for the provision of service dogs to veterans

Section 2 of the Committee bill would direct VA to establish a five-year pilot program, to begin within 24 months of enactment, to award competitive grants to nonprofit organizations to provide service dogs to eligible veterans. Nonprofit applicants would be required to submit proposals detailing how they would train both veterans and dogs, provide additional support services, publicize program availability, and adhere to humane standards. Applicants would need to demonstrate experience in training service dogs in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Grants could not exceed \$2 million annually and could be used to plan, develop, implement, and manage programs exclusively serving eligible veterans, with administrative expenses subject to VA-established limits. Grant recipients would be required to notify veterans of VA funding, provide information on available benefits, and be prohibited from charging fees to participating veterans. VA would offer training and technical assistance to grantees, establish oversight and reporting requirements, and take necessary actions to ensure proper use of funds. VA would further provide each veteran receiving a service dog with commercial veterinary insurance, continuing regardless of the pilot program's duration.

Eligible veterans would include those with visual or hearing impairments, mobility limitations, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), or other conditions for which a service dog can assist in independent living.

The term “service dog” is defined in the Committee bill as a dog individually trained to perform tasks directly related to a veteran’s disability or condition, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and accompanying federal regulations.

Background

For more than 60 years, VA policy and regulations have recognized the value of service dogs for certain conditions and the benefits they can provide to veterans. VA provides benefits for service dogs for eligible veterans who have been diagnosed with a visual, hearing, or substantial mobility impairment when the VA clinical team treating the veteran for such impairment determines, based upon medical judgment, that it is optimal for the veteran to manage the impairment and live independently with the assistance of a trained service dog. VA provides a commercially available veterinary insurance policy for veterans with service dogs, as well as payments for travel expenses associated with obtaining a dog if the veteran is eligible for beneficiary travel under 38 U.S.C. § 111 and 38 C.F.R. part 70, and if pre-approved for such benefits.¹

In recent years, Congress has increasingly recognized the therapeutic value of service dogs for veterans, particularly those suffering from PTSD, TBI, and other service-related disabilities and conditions. A key milestone in this recognition was the enactment of the *Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) for Veterans Therapy Act* (P.L. 117–37), which was signed into law in August 2021 and directed VA to establish a pilot program for canine training as part of complementary and integrative health care for veterans with PTSD. According to research, animal-assisted therapy provides value to veterans who engage in it, including physiological effects of increased oxytocin and dopamine levels and decreased cortisol levels, as well as a sense of mission and duty to their fellow veterans, knowing that the dog being trained will be paired with a veteran at the end of the dog’s approximately two-year training timeline.²

The Committee bill has been introduced across multiple Congresses, with the intent of boosting the capabilities, via grant funding, of nonprofit service dog organizations (SDOs) providing individually trained service dogs to veterans who wish to utilize a service dog to do work or perform tasks to mitigate the effects of a disability, condition, or diagnosis. The Committee is aware that veterans are seeking out service dogs for associated positive effects, including lower anxiety and depression levels, improvements in areas of emotional and social well-being, as well as psychosocial functioning—often independent of VA.³ Similar to other VA grant programs, Congress intends to help veterans in local communities across the country by providing VA support to already extant SDOs so the organization can increase their ability to pair more veterans with service dogs.

Unfortunately, the demand for service dogs in the nonprofit ecosystem is outstripping supply. Many SDOs operate on donations

¹Hearing To Consider Pending Legislation: Hearing Before Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, 118th Cong. (July 12, 2023).

²*Animal Assisted Therapies*, U.S. Dep’t of Veterans Affairs, available at <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/docs/Animal-Assisted-Therapies.pdf>.

³Sarah C. Leighton, *et al.*, *Service Dogs for Veterans and Military Members With Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Nonrandomized Controlled Trial*, JAMA (2024).

and charitable support, with training costs ranging from \$20,000 to \$40,000 per dog. While these SDOs do good work, resources are finite, resulting in long wait times for veterans in search of a service dog. The Committee believes this pilot is an opportunity to help reduce delays by increasing the number of dogs available to veterans.

Recognizing the effect that service dogs can have, Senator Thom Tillis from North Carolina, the Committee bill's lead sponsor, stated in an April 10, 2025, press release marking the introduction of the bill:

Long after the fighting on the battlefield ends, too many of the courageous servicemembers come home and continue to battle against enemies that many consider just as insidious as those with guns, grenades, and rockets. That is why in 2021, I introduced the PAWS Act that created a pilot program to provide canine training to eligible veterans, but it is clear we must continue to build on that effort to ensure this program is expanded to veterans in need. The *SAVES Act* will allow more veterans who are struggling with the invisible wounds of war to receive service dogs that could ultimately save their lives. We must repay the debt to the men and women who served our country, I hope congress quickly passes this legislation to provide them with his important resource.

In the same press release, Senator Richard Blumenthal from Connecticut, the Committee bill's original cosponsor, stated:

Service dogs provide vital support to our brave servicemembers struggling with PTSD and other service-related injuries after they return from the battlefield. Military men and women are often fighting invisible battles when they return home from service, and these canine companions are able to offer them comfort and ease their transition back into civilian life. The *SAVES Act* ensures that nonprofits have the necessary resources to provide our nation's heroes with access to the essential and even life-saving assistance of service dogs.

The same press release included support for the bill from Disabled American Veterans, The American Legion, and K9s for Warriors, all attesting to the life-saving assistance service dogs can provide to veterans grappling with the invisible wounds of war and facing physical challenges from mobility issues to blindness. The total support for this bipartisan legislation includes over 30 SDOs and Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs).

The Committee recognizes suicide prevention as VA's top clinical priority and understands that there is no single solution to preventing suicide. The Committee supports VA's broad efforts to reduce veteran suicide and sees potential benefit in expanding access to service dogs trained to support veterans' mental health and independence. The Committee views the pilot program that would be established by this bill as a way to assess feasibility and impact of this approach to suicide prevention, and urges VA to use the pilot to build the growing body of evidence that service dogs can

aid mental health, including by reducing PTSD symptoms.⁴ The Committee is also hopeful that informing veterans that these service dogs have been made possible in part by this VA program will help encourage veterans not currently seeking VA services to consider seeking out and utilizing VA care and benefits.

The Committee notes that VA opposed including TBI as a qualifying condition in the Committee bill on the ground that service dogs are already recognized as aiding veterans' mobility issues. The Committee believes that the pilot program is an important opportunity to better understand what effect service dogs can have to mitigate detrimental impacts of TBI on a veteran's functioning and quality of life outside of mobility. The Committee has heard from numerous veterans who report better functioning and quality of life because of their service dogs. The holistic listing of disabilities, conditions, and diagnoses is intended to ensure nonprofits are training and pairing service dogs with veterans in a manner that results in more veterans who want service dogs being paired with a service dog individually trained to perform tasks related to their disability, condition, or diagnosis.

The Committee also notes VA's concerns regarding clear authority for the administration of a grant program, and oversight to ensure the most ideal use of funds to increase the supply of service dogs available to veterans. This bill, if enacted into law, would authorize and direct VA to establish and execute the grant program described in the bill. Accordingly, the Committee provides, in the legislative text, latitude to VA to devise the application for the grant program with the following included components that will aid the oversight of the program and guide the awarding of grants: a proposal for the provision of service dogs to eligible veterans and how the nonprofit SDO will communicate results to VA; a description of the training that will be provided for veterans and dogs in the program; any additional support or services provided to eligible veterans and their service dogs after pairing (as many SDOs maintain enduring relationships and community with the veterans who graduate their programs); a plan for publicizing the program and availability of service dogs to eligible veterans; a commitment to humane standards for animals' training and conditions; and that such applicants have demonstrated experience in producing dogs in compliance with the ADA.

The Committee bill directs VA to implement this program independent of outdated criteria and regulations outlined in 38 C.F.R. § 17.148 which are used in the administration of VA's internal Veterinary Health Insurance Benefit (VHIB), particularly those that limit eligibility to veterans with "a visual, hearing, or substantial mobility impairment" and require third-party accreditation memberships. Such definitions were never intended to govern external grantmaking and should not restrict nonprofit partnerships under the Committee bill.

⁴Sarah C. Leighton, *et al.*, *Service Dogs for Veterans and Military Members With Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Nonrandomized Controlled Trial*, JAMA (2024); Jeremy Ramirez, *et al.*, *Enhancing PTSD Management in Veterans: A Longitudinal Study of the Therapeutic Role of Psychiatric Service Dogs*, JOURNAL OF ARCHIVES IN MILITARY MEDICINE (Mar. 28, 2025); Jeremy Ramirez, *et al.*, *Barking Up the Right Tree: A Qualitative Study of Health Outcomes Among Military Veteran Handlers who Receive Service Dog Assistance*, JOURNAL OF ARCHIVES IN MILITARY MEDICINE (Aug. 10, 2025).

The Committee recognizes that nonprofit entities provide accreditation to SDOs, certifying certain training standards and practices, and recognizes the value that such entities provide to the nonprofit SDO ecosystem. Legislative efforts over the past decade have generally favored “accreditor-neutral” approaches, and bills that avoid naming specific third-party nonprofits have been advanced further. Accordingly, Congress expects VA to establish its own uniform, transparent eligibility standards through Departmental policy, informed by input from Congress and across the nonprofit SDO community to ensure that all applicants are evaluated according to transparent, government-defined standards.

Veterans seeking a service dog from a participating nonprofit SDO should not be subject to additional VA evaluation, approval, or medical prescriptions by VA as a condition of access. Requiring VA clinician evaluations or prescriptions would introduce unnecessary delays, contradict the program’s nonprofit-led design, and risk restricting access to veterans who have already been vetted and accepted by qualified organizations. The Committee encourages VA to implement the program consistent with standard federal grantmaking practices, which do not involve agency review of individual recipients of nonprofit services unless explicitly required by statute.

The Committee also expects that VA will not limit nonprofit eligibility based on third-party accreditation status. While these organizations provide respected models, reliance on private accreditation systems rather than VA-administered criteria would privilege one class of applicants over a great many others, artificially restrict the pool of qualified applicants, and undermine the intent of this legislation. Additionally, VA has the authority to establish terms, conditions, and limitations in any agreement entered into with an applicant nonprofit prior to awarding any grant funds. VA is also empowered to request reports, conduct surveys, and administer questionnaires to grant recipients in whatever form so prescribed by the Department to ensure proper use of funds toward the intended goal of pairing more veterans with more trained service dogs.

Committee Bill

Section 2 would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a five-year pilot program, to begin within 24 months of enactment, under which competitive grants would be awarded to nonprofit organizations to provide service dogs to eligible veterans. Nonprofit applicants would be required to submit proposals describing how they will train both veterans and dogs, provide additional support services, publicize program availability, maintain humane animal standards, and demonstrate experience in training service dogs in compliance with the ADA.

Section 2 would further stipulate that grants would be capped at \$2 million per fiscal year, with VA authorized to increase grant amounts for inflation or program needs after providing 30 days’ notice to the House and Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committees. This is intended to ensure support can continue to deliver results for veterans by increasing capacity at grant-recipient SDOs, while maintaining Congressional oversight. Grant funds would be limited to being used to plan, develop, implement, and manage programs ex-

clusively serving eligible veterans, and are subject to limits on administrative expenses and any other VA-imposed conditions.

Section 2 of the Committee bill would also define eligibility for services under this grant program would be determined by the non-profit recipient, not VA. The intent of Congress is for VA to support the veteran-serving work being done by grant recipients, distinct from VA's internal clinical benefits. As such, VA's role would be limited to reviewing, awarding, and overseeing grants based on the merit, experience, financial stewardship, and capacity of the non-profit SDOs that apply. At no point would VA be expected or authorized to evaluate the veterans served by these organizations, nor to determine whether a veteran "qualifies" for a nonprofit SDO's program. Each nonprofit SDO already operates with its own intake and suitability criteria, which fall outside VA's purview in this context, and can independently verify veterans' eligibility in accordance with the criteria specified in the *SAVES Act*.

Per section 2 of the Committee bill, grant recipients would inform veterans that the service dog is funded by the Department, provide information on available benefits, and be prohibited from charging fees to participating veterans. VA would be able to provide technical assistance to grantees and require reporting to ensure proper use of funds.

The Committee bill would also require VA to collaboratively engage with eligible nonprofit SDOs and VSOs throughout the implementation process to ensure the program meets the needs of diverse veterans across the country.

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

In accordance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate and section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee provides the following cost estimate, prepared by the Congressional Budget Office:

At a Glance				
S. 1441, Service Dogs Assisting Veterans Act of 2025				
As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on July 30, 2025				
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2025	2025-2030	2025-2035	
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	9	12	
Revenues	0	0	0	
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	9	12	
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	0	31	42	
Increases <i>net direct spending</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036? Increases <i>on-budget deficits</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	< \$2.5 billion < \$5 billion	Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?		Yes
		Mandate Effects		
		Contains intergovernmental mandate?		No
		Contains private-sector mandate?		No

The bill would:

- Require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish a pilot program to award grants to nonprofit entities for the provision of service dogs to veterans
- Direct VA to provide veterinary insurance for such service dogs

Estimated budgetary effects would mainly stem from:

- Providing grants to nonprofit organizations
- Funding veterinary insurance for service dogs

Bill summary: S. 1441 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish a pilot program to award grants to nonprofit entities to provide service dogs to eligible veterans over the 2027–2031 period. The bill also would require VA to provide veterinary insurance for those dogs.

Estimated Federal cost: The estimated budgetary effects of S. 1441 are shown in Table 1. The costs of the legislation fall within budget function 700 (veterans benefits and services).

TABLE 1.—ESTIMATED BUDGETARY EFFECTS OF S. 1441

	By fiscal year, millions of dollars—														2025— 2030	2025— 2035
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035					
INCREASES IN DIRECT SPENDING																
Estimated Budget Authority	0	*	2	2	2	3	3	*	*	*	*	9	12			
Estimated Outlays	0	*	2	2	2	3	3	*	*	*	*	9	12			
INCREASES IN SPENDING SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATION																
Estimated Authorization	0	*	8	8	8	7	7	1	1	1	1	31	42			
Estimated Outlays	0	*	8	8	8	7	7	1	1	1	1	31	42			

* = between zero and \$500,000.

Basis of estimate: For this estimate, CBO assumes that S. 1441 will be enacted near the beginning of fiscal year 2026 and that outlays will follow historical spending patterns for affected programs.

Provisions that affect spending subject to appropriation and direct spending: Section 2 of S. 1441 would require VA to establish a five-year pilot program to provide grants to nonprofit entities for the provision of service dogs to eligible veterans beginning in 2027. The program also would require VA to provide veterinary insurance for dogs acquired under the program, including during the period after the pilot program expires.

The bill authorizes the appropriation of \$10 million annually during the five-year period of the program's operation. CBO expects that the authorized amounts would cover the costs of awarding grants to nonprofit entities and providing veterinary insurance for dogs acquired through the program. Based on information from VA and similar programs, CBO estimates that approximately 1,000 veterans would receive dogs under the program. Under the bill, VA would be required to continue providing veterinary insurance for those dogs after the pilot ends. CBO estimates that the cost of providing insurance coverage over the 2032–2035 period would total \$4 million, assuming an average annual cost of \$1,100 per dog. In total, CBO estimates that implementing section 2 would cost \$54 million over the 2025–2035 period.

CBO expects that some of the costs of implementing the bill would be paid from the Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF) established by

Public Law 117–168, the Honoring our PACT Act. The TEF is a mandatory appropriation that VA uses to pay for health care, disability claims processing, medical research, and IT modernization that benefit veterans who were exposed to environmental hazards.

Additional spending from the TEF would occur if legislation increases the costs of similar activities that benefit veterans with such exposure. Thus, in addition to increasing spending subject to appropriation, enacting section 2 would increase amounts paid from the TEF, which are classified as direct spending. CBO projects that the proportion of costs paid by the TEF will grow over time based on the amount of formerly discretionary appropriations that CBO expects will be provided through the mandatory appropriation as specified in the Honoring our PACT Act.¹

CBO estimates that over the 2025–2035 period, implementing section 2 would increase spending subject to appropriation by \$42 million and direct spending by \$12 million.

Pay-As-You-Go considerations: The Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010 establishes budget-reporting and enforcement procedures for legislation affecting direct spending or revenues. The net changes in outlays that are subject to those pay-as-you-go procedures are shown in Table 1.

Increase in long-term net direct spending and deficits: CBO estimates that enacting S. 1441 would not increase net direct spending by more than \$2.5 billion in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036.

CBO estimates that enacting S. 1441 would not increase on-budget deficits by more than \$5 billion in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036.

Mandates: The bill contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.

Previous CBO estimate: On August 7, 2025, CBO transmitted a cost estimate for H.R. 2605, the Service Dogs Assisting Veterans Act, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on July 23, 2025. Both H.R. 2605 and S. 1441 would establish a pilot program to provide grants for service dogs and fund veterinary insurance such service dogs. H.R. 2605 includes a provision to extend the reduction in certain pension payments, which would reduce direct spending. S. 1441 does not include such a provision; thus, the net costs of the latter bill are higher.

Estimate prepared by: Federal Costs: Noah Callahan; Mandates: Lucy Marret.

Estimate reviewed by: David Newman, Chief, Defense, International Affairs, and Veterans' Affairs Cost Estimates Unit; Kathleen FitzGerald, Chief, Public and Private Mandates Unit; Christina Hawley Anthony, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.

Estimate approved by: Phillip L. Swagel, Director, Congressional Budget Office.

REGULATORY IMPACT STATEMENT

In compliance with paragraph 11(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee has made an evaluation of the regulatory impact of the Committee bill. The Committee finds that

¹ For additional information about estimated spending from the TEF, see Congressional Budget Office, "Toxic Exposures Fund—January 2025 Baseline" (January 2025), <https://tinyurl.com/465ytckb>.

the Committee bill would impose regulatory requirements on VA's participating nonprofit partners. It is not expected to adversely affect personal privacy and the paperwork resulting from enactment is expected to be moderate.

TABULATION OF VOTES CAST IN COMMITTEE

In compliance with paragraph 7(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the following is a tabulation of votes cast in person or by proxy by members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs at its July 30, 2025, meeting.

During this meeting, Chairman Moran called up 23 bills, including S. 1441, to be considered en bloc. The bills were reported favorably by voice vote en bloc.

AGENCY REPORT

On May, 21 2025, Thomas O'Toole, Acting Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services at the Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, appeared before the Committee and submitted testimony on S. 1441. An excerpt from that testimony relevant to S. 1441 is reprinted below:

STATEMENT OF MR. THOMAS O'TOOLE, ACTING ASSISTANT
UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH FOR CLINICAL SERVICES
AT THE VETERAN'S HEALTH ADMINISTRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)

S. 1441 SERVICE DOGS ASSISTING VETERANS ACT OF 2025
(SAVES ACT OF 2025)

Section 2(a) of this bill would require VA, not later than 24 months after the date of enactment, to establish a 5-year pilot program under which VA would award grants, on a competitive basis, to nonprofit entities to provide service dogs to eligible Veterans. Section 2(b) would provide that, to be eligible to receive a grant, nonprofit entities would have to submit to VA an application at such time, in such a manner, and containing such commitments and information as VA may require. Applications would have to include a proposal for the provision of service dogs to eligible Veterans, including how the entity would communicate with VA to ensure an increasing number of service dogs are provided to Veterans; applicants would also have to include a description of training and services provided by the entity, as well as the qualifications of the entity (including demonstrated experience in training service dogs in compliance with the requirements of the ADA).

Under section 2(c), VA would have to award a grant to each non-profit entity for which VA has approved an application. VA and the entity would have to enter into an agreement containing such terms, conditions, and limitations as VA determines appropriate. The maximum grant amount VA could award to a non-profit entity under this section would be \$2 million. VA would have to establish intervals of payment for the administration of each grant awarded under this section.

Under section 2(d), grantees would have to use the grant amounts to plan, develop, implement, or manage (or any combination thereof) one or more programs that provide service dogs to eligible Veterans and ensures only eligible Veterans are allowed to participate in the program. VA could establish a maximum amount for each grant awarded under this section to cover administrative expenses. VA also could establish other conditions or limitations on the use of grant amounts.

Under section 2(e), grantees would have to notify each Veteran that receives a service dog through the grant that the dog is being paid for, in whole or in part, by VA, and they would have to inform such Veterans of the benefits and services available from VA for the Veteran and service dog. Grantees could not charge a fee to a Veteran receiving a service dog through the grant.

Under section 2(f), VA would have to provide to each Veteran who receives a service dog through a grant a commercially available veterinary insurance policy for the service dog, and, if VA provides such a veterinary insurance policy to a Veteran, VA would have to continue to provide the policy without regard to the continuation or termination of the pilot program.

Under section 2(g), VA could provide training and technical assistance to recipients of grants under this section.

Under section 2(h), VA would have to establish oversight and monitoring requirements as appropriate to ensure grants are used appropriately, and VA could take actions as necessary to address any issues identified through the enforcement of such requirements. VA could require each grantee to provide reports or written answers to specific questions, surveys, or questionnaires as VA determines necessary.

Section 2(i) would define terms for purposes of this Act. The term “eligible veteran” would be defined to mean Veterans under 38 U.S.C. § 101 who, as determined by a physician, have one more of the following disabilities, conditions, or diagnoses: blindness or visual impairment; loss of use of a limb, paralysis, or other significant mobility issue, including mental health mobility; loss of hearing; posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD); traumatic brain injury (TBI); or any other disability, condition, or diagnosis VA determines, based on medical judgment, that it is optimal for the Veteran to manage the disability, condition, or diagnosis and live independently through the assistance of a service dog. The term “service dog” would mean any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks that are for the benefit of a Veteran with a disability, condition, or diagnosis described above and directly related to the disability, condition, or diagnosis of the Veteran.

Section 2(j) would authorize to be appropriated \$10 million for each of the five consecutive fiscal years following the fiscal year in which the pilot program is established.

VA supports this bill, subject to amendments and the availability of appropriations

VA provides benefits for service dogs for eligible Veterans who have been diagnosed with a visual, hearing, or substantial mobility impairment (including mental health mobility) when the VA clinical team treating the Veteran for such impairment determines, based upon medical judgment, that it is optimal for the Veteran to manage the impairment and live independently through the assistance of a trained service dog. See 38 C.F.R. §17.148(b). VA provides a commercially available veterinary insurance policy for service dogs, as well as payments for travel expenses associated with obtaining a dog if the Veteran is eligible for beneficiary travel under 38 U.S.C. §111 and 38 C.F.R. part 70 and if pre-approved for such benefits.

While not involving the provision of service dogs, since February 2022, VA has been implementing the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy Act (P.L. 117–37), which requires VA to conduct a pilot program to provide canine training to eligible Veterans diagnosed with PTSD as an element of a complementary and integrative health program for such Veterans. Service dogs provide essential support for many Veterans.

We appreciate that the bill generally focuses on creating a more direct connection in the legislation between grant funds and the provision of service dogs to eligible Veterans, but we believe this could be clearer. Specifically, in section 2(d), the bill would require grantees to use funds “to plan, develop, implement, or manage (or any combination thereof) one or more” programs that provide service dogs to eligible Veterans. Allowing the use of funds to plan a program that provides service dogs, but which ultimately does not provide service dogs, is not an ideal use of funds. We recommend the bill simply state that grantees would use funds to provide service dogs to eligible Veterans. In VA’s experience, Veterans can wait between 1 and 3 years between when a dog has been recommended by VA and when a Veteran has been fully paired with a service dog that has graduated training. VA believes the grants provided under this authority could help increase the supply of service dogs to reduce this delay. In any grant program, but particularly in the case of service dog training, it is essential to ensure that funds are properly used.

Several provisions in the bill raise concerns. First, VA recommends clearly aligning the definition of service dog under this section with VA’s existing definition in regulations. Second, VA is concerned about the list of disabilities that was presented in the bill. Specifically, the inclusion of TBI, for which a Veteran may already otherwise qualify based on having a significant mobility issue, and PTSD, as there is no substantial evidence to date that service dogs provide improvements in functioning and quality of life for Veterans with PTSD as compared to emotional support dogs. VA recommends striking these provisions. We note, similar to the discussion above regarding Veterans with

TBI qualifying for a service dog when they have a significant mobility issue, Veterans with PTSD can receive a service dog on the same basis. Further, VA recommends including additional language that would ensure clear authority for the administration of a grant program. Finally, we note that the current bill expands eligibility to all Veterans who meet the requirements of 38 U.S.C. § 101, not just Veterans enrolled in VA health care. This would complicate administration of this program.

We also note that this proposal would likely require dedicated staff in a new office to administer this program.

VA does not have a cost estimate for this bill.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

Pursuant to paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee finds no changes in existing law made by S. 1441, as ordered reported.

