

115TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 2225

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program  
on dog training therapy.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 28, 2017

Mr. STIVERS (for himself and Mr. WALZ) introduced the following bill; which  
was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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## A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out  
a pilot program on dog training therapy.

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 “Veterans Dog Training  
5       Therapy Act”.

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

8       (a) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than 120  
9       days after the date of the enactment of the Act, the Sec-  
10      retary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a pilot program

1 under which the Secretary shall enter into a contract with  
2 one or more appropriate non-government entities for the  
3 purpose of assessing the effectiveness of addressing post-  
4 deployment mental health and post-traumatic stress dis-  
5 order symptoms through a therapeutic medium of training  
6 service dogs for veterans with disabilities. Such program  
7 shall be carried out through the Center for Compassionate  
8 Innovation of the Veterans Health Administration of the  
9 Department of Veterans Affairs.

10 (b) DURATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—The pilot pro-  
11 gram required by subsection (a) shall be carried out dur-  
12 ing the five-year period beginning on the date of the com-  
13 mencement of the pilot program.

14 (c) LOCATIONS OF PILOT PROGRAM.—In entering  
15 into contracts for purposes of the pilot program, the Sec-  
16 retary shall seek to enter into contracts with appropriate  
17 non-government entities located in close proximity to at  
18 least three but not more than five medical centers of the  
19 Department.

20 (d) APPROPRIATE NON-GOVERNMENT ENTITIES.—  
21 For purposes of the pilot program, an appropriate non-  
22 government entity is an entity that is certified in the train-  
23 ing and handling of service dogs.

24 (e) TRAINING AREA.—The Secretary shall provide to  
25 a non-government entity with which the Secretary enters

1 into a contract under this section access to a training area  
2 in a facility of the Department that would be appropriate  
3 for use in educating veterans with mental health condi-  
4 tions in the art and science of service dog training and  
5 handling. Such training area shall—

6 (1) include a dedicated space that is suitable  
7 for grooming and training dogs indoors;

8 (2) be wheelchair accessible;

9 (3) include classroom or lecture space;

10 (4) include office space for staff;

11 (5) include a suitable space for storing training  
12 equipment;

13 (6) provide for periodic use of other training  
14 areas for training the dogs with wheelchairs and  
15 conducting other exercises;

16 (7) include outdoor exercise and toileting space  
17 for dogs; and

18 (8) provide transportation for weekly field trips  
19 to train dogs in other environments.

20 (f) DESIGN OF PILOT PROGRAM.—Each contract en-  
21 tered into under subsection (a) shall provide that the non-  
22 government entity shall—

23 (1) employ at least one person with clinical ex-  
24 perience related to mental health;

1           (2) ensure that veterans participating in the  
2           program receive training from certified service dog  
3           training instructors;

4           (3) ensure that each service dog in training  
5           participating in the pilot program is taught all es-  
6           sential commands pertaining to service dog skills;

7           (4) ensure that the pilot program involves both  
8           lecture of service dog training methodologies and  
9           practical hands-on training and grooming of service  
10          dogs; and

11          (5) ensure that the pilot program is designed  
12          to—

13                (A) maximize the therapeutic benefits to  
14                veterans participating in the program; and

15                (B) provide well-trained service dogs to  
16                veterans with disabilities; and

17          (6) in hiring service dog training instructors to  
18          carry out training under the pilot program, give a  
19          preference to veterans who have successfully grad-  
20          uated from post-traumatic stress disorder or other  
21          residential treatment programs and who have re-  
22          ceived adequate certification in service dog training.

23          (g) ADMINISTRATION.—In order to carry out the  
24          pilot program under section (a), the Secretary of Veterans  
25          Affairs shall—

1           (1) administer the program through the Center  
2       for Compassionate Innovation of the Veterans  
3       Health Administration of the Department in collabo-  
4       ration with the Recreation Therapy Service of the  
5       Department under the direction of a certified rec-  
6       reational therapist with sufficient administrative ex-  
7       perience to help oversee the pilot program; and

8           (2) establish a director of therapeutic service  
9       dog training with a background working in social  
10      services, experience in teaching others to train serv-  
11      ice dogs in a vocational setting, and at least one  
12      year of experience working with veterans or active  
13      duty service members with post-traumatic stress dis-  
14      order in a clinical setting.

15      (h) VETERAN ELIGIBILITY.—The Secretary shall se-  
16      lect veterans for participation in the pilot program. A vet-  
17      eran with post-traumatic stress disorder or other post-de-  
18      ployment mental health condition may volunteer to partici-  
19      pate in the pilot program, if the Secretary determines that  
20      there are adequate program resources available for such  
21      veteran at the pilot program site. Veterans may partici-  
22      pate in the pilot program in conjunction with the com-  
23      pensated work therapy program of the Department of Vet-  
24      erans Affairs.

1 (i) COLLECTION OF DATA.—The Secretary shall col-  
2 lect data on the pilot program required under subsection  
3 (a) to determine how effective the program is for the vet-  
4 erans participating in the program. Such data shall in-  
5 clude data to determine how effectively the program as-  
6 sists veterans in—

7 (1) reducing stigma associated with post-trau-  
8 matic stress disorder or other post-deployment men-  
9 tal health condition;

10 (2) improving emotional regulation;

11 (3) improving patience;

12 (4) instilling or re-establishing a sense of pur-  
13 pose;

14 (5) providing an opportunity to help fellow vet-  
15 erans;

16 (6) reintegrating into the community;

17 (7) exposing the dog to new environments and  
18 in doing so, helping the veteran reduce social isola-  
19 tion and withdrawal;

20 (8) building relationship skills, including par-  
21 enting skills;

22 (9) relaxing the hyper-vigilant survival state;

23 (10) improving sleep patterns; and

24 (11) enabling veterans to decrease the use of  
25 pain medication.

1       (j) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one year  
2 after the date of the commencement of the pilot program  
3 under subsection (a), and each year thereafter for the du-  
4 ration of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit to  
5 Congress a report on the pilot program. Each such report  
6 shall include—

7           (1) the number of veterans participating in the  
8 pilot program;

9           (2) a description of the services carried out  
10 under the pilot program;

11          (3) the effects that participating in the pilot  
12 program has on the following—

13           (A) symptoms of post-traumatic stress dis-  
14 order and post-deployment adjustment difficul-  
15 ties, including depression, maintenance of sobri-  
16 ety, suicidal ideations, and homelessness;

17           (B) potentially relevant physiological mark-  
18 ers that possibly relate to the interactions with  
19 the service dogs;

20           (C) family dynamics;

21           (D) insomnia and pain management; and

22           (E) overall well-being; and

23          (4) the recommendations of the Secretary with  
24 respect to the extension or expansion of the pilot  
25 program.

1       (k) DEFINITION.—For the purposes of this section,  
2 the term “service dog training instructor” means an in-  
3 structor who provides the direct training of veterans with  
4 post-traumatic stress disorder and other post-deployment  
5 issues in the art and science of service dog training and  
6 handling.

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