

115TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 5918

To direct the Secretary of Defense to carry out a program on service dog training for members of the Armed Forces with post-traumatic stress disorder or other post-deployment mental health conditions.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 22, 2018

Ms. SHEA-PORTER (for herself, Mr. LOBIONDO, Mr. NORCROSS, Mr. WALZ, and Mr. JONES) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Armed Services

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Defense to carry out a program on service dog training for members of the Armed Forces with post-traumatic stress disorder or other post-deployment mental health conditions.

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 “Department of Defense
5 Service Dog Training Therapy Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. SERVICE DOG TRAINING THERAPY FOR MEMBERS**
2 **WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**
3 **OR OTHER POST-DEPLOYMENT MENTAL**
4 **HEALTH CONDITIONS.**

5 (a) PROGRAM.—The Secretary of Defense, acting
6 through the Director of the Defense Health Agency, shall
7 carry out a program under which members of the Armed
8 Forces with post-traumatic stress disorder or other post-
9 deployment mental health conditions train service dogs for
10 veterans with disabilities. The Secretary shall carry out
11 the program in a manner that ensures that such training
12 is a form of therapy that addresses such post-traumatic
13 stress disorder or other post-deployment mental health
14 conditions.

15 (b) APPROPRIATE NONGOVERNMENT ENTITIES.—
16 The Secretary shall carry out the program under sub-
17 section (a) by entering into a contract with one or more
18 appropriate nongovernment entities that are certified in
19 the training and handling of service dogs and have experi-
20 ence carrying out such a program.

21 (c) MEMBER ELIGIBILITY.—A member of the Armed
22 Forces may participate in the program under subsection
23 (a) if the Secretary determines that—

24 (1) such member has post-traumatic stress dis-
25 order or other post-deployment mental health condi-
26 tions; and

1 (2) there are adequate program resources avail-
2 able for the member to participate at the location of
3 the member.

4 (d) LOCATIONS.—The Secretary shall seek to enter
5 into a contract under subsection (b) with appropriate non-
6 government entities located in close proximity to military
7 medical treatment facilities.

8 (e) TRAINING AREA.—The Secretary shall provide to
9 a nongovernment entity with which the Secretary enters
10 into a contract under subsection (b) access to a training
11 area in a facility of the Department that would be appro-
12 priate for use in educating members of the Armed Forces
13 participating in the program in the art and science of serv-
14 ice dog training and handling. Such training area shall—

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

17 (2) be wheelchair accessible;

18 (3) include classroom or lecture space;

19 (4) include office space for staff;

20 (5) include a suitable space for storing training
21 equipment;

22 (6) provide for periodic use of other training
23 areas for training the dogs with wheelchairs and
24 conducting other exercises;

1 (7) include outdoor exercise and toileting space
2 for dogs; and

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

5 (f) DESIGN OF PROGRAM.—Each contract entered
6 into under subsection (b) shall provide that the nongovern-
7 ment entity shall—

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

10 (2) ensure that members of the Armed Forces
11 participating in the program receive training from
12 certified service dog training instructors;

13 (3) ensure that each service dog in training
14 participating in the program is taught all essential
15 commands pertaining to service dog skills;

16 (4) ensure that the program involves both lec-
17 ture of service dog training methodologies and prac-
18 tical hands-on training and grooming of service
19 dogs; and

20 (5) ensure that the program is designed to—

21 (A) maximize the therapeutic benefits to
22 members of the Armed Forces participating in
23 the program; and

24 (B) provide well-trained service dogs to
25 veterans with disabilities.

1 (g) ADMINISTRATION.—In order to carry out the pro-
2 gram under subsection (a), the Secretary shall—

3 (1) administer the program through the De-
4 fense Health Agency under the direction of a cer-
5 tified occupational recreational therapist with suffi-
6 cient administrative experience to help oversee the
7 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 military medical treatment facility set-
12 ting, and at least one year of experience working
13 with veterans or active duty service members with
14 post-traumatic stress disorder in a clinical setting.

15 (h) COLLECTION OF DATA.—The Secretary shall col-
16 lect data on the program under subsection (a) to deter-
17 mine how effective the program is for the members of the
18 Armed Forces participating in the program. Such data
19 shall include data to determine how effectively the pro-
20 gram assists members in—

21 (1) reducing stigma associated with post-trau-
22 matic stress disorder or other post-deployment men-
23 tal health conditions;

24 (2) improving emotional regulation;

25 (3) improving patience;

1 (4) instilling or re-establishing a sense of pur-
2 pose;

3 (5) providing an opportunity to help veterans;

4 (6) reintegrating into the community;

5 (7) exposing the dog to new environments and
6 in doing so, helping the member reduce social isola-
7 tion and withdrawal;

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

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

11 (10) improving sleep patterns; and

12 (11) enabling members to decrease the use of
13 pain medication.

14 (i) REPORTS.—Each year the Secretary shall submit
15 to the Committees on Armed Services of the House of
16 Representatives and the Senate a report on the program
17 under subsection (a). Each such report shall include—

18 (1) the number of members of the Armed
19 Forces participating in the program;

20 (2) a description of the services carried out
21 under the program;

22 (3) the effects that participating in the program
23 has on—

24 (A) symptoms of post-traumatic stress dis-
25 order and post-deployment adjustment difficul-

1 ties, including depression, maintenance of sobri-
2 ety, suicidal ideations, and homelessness;

3 (B) potentially relevant physiological mark-
4 ers that possibly relate to the interactions with
5 the service dogs;

6 (C) family dynamics;

7 (D) insomnia and pain management; and

8 (E) overall well-being; and

9 (4) the recommendations of the Secretary with
10 respect to the expansion of the program.

11 (j) SERVICE DOG TRAINING INSTRUCTOR DE-
12 FINED.—In this section, the term “service dog training
13 instructor” means an instructor who provides the direct
14 training of members of the Armed Forces with post-trau-
15 matic stress disorder and other post-deployment mental
16 health conditions in the art and science of service dog
17 training and handling.

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