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(Original Signature of Member)

114TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. _____

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

Mr. DESANTIS introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

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. FINDINGS.**

4 Congress makes the following findings:

5 (1) An estimated 14 percent of members of the
6 Armed Forces returning from active duty service in
7 support of Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation

1 Enduring Freedom suffer from post-traumatic stress
2 disorder.

3 (2) The resulting hyper-stimulation of the fight-
4 flight-freeze response associated with post-traumatic
5 stress disorder poses a threat to the successful soci-
6 etal re-integration of such members of the Armed
7 Forces.

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

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

15 **SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM ON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS**
16 **AFFAIRS PROVISION OF SERVICE DOGS TO**
17 **CERTAIN VETERANS WITH SEVERE POST-**
18 **TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER.**

19 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
20 fairs, acting through the Office of Patient Centered Care
21 and Cultural Transformation, shall carry out a pilot pro-
22 gram under which the Secretary shall provide to eligible
23 veterans with service dogs. The provision of a service dog
24 under the pilot program shall be done in addition to other
25 types of treatment provided for post-traumatic stress dis-

1 order and shall not replace established treatment modali-
2 ties. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall furnish vet-
3 erinary health insurance for each dog provided under the
4 pilot program.

5 (b) ELIGIBILITY.—

6 (1) INITIAL ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible for a
7 service dog under the pilot program a veteran
8 shall—

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

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

18 (C) have served on active duty in the
19 Armed Forces on or after September 11, 2001;
20 and

21 (D) have not experienced satisfactory im-
22 provement in post-traumatic stress disorder
23 symptoms after being treated with established
24 evidence-based therapies.

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

7 (c) CONTRACT AUTHORITY.—

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

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

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

22 (C) ensures all service canines pass the
23 American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen
24 test prior to permanent placement with a recipi-
25 ent; and

1 (D) provides follow-up support service for
2 the life of the service canine.

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

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

12 (1) an evaluation of the effectiveness of the
13 pilot program with respect to—

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

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

21 (C) lessening the symptoms of post-trau-
22 matic stress disorder; and

23 (D) reducing the dependence of partici-
24 pants on prescription narcotics and psycho-
25 tropic medication; and

1 (2) the recommendations of the Comptroller
2 General with respect to the continuation or expan-
3 sion of the program.

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

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

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