

.....
(Original Signature of Member)

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. _____

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to enter into contracts with qualified nonprofit organizations to provide service dogs to eligible veterans with a mental health mobility disorder related to post-traumatic stress or traumatic brain injury, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. BILIRAKIS 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 enter into contracts with qualified nonprofit organizations to provide service dogs to eligible veterans with a mental health mobility disorder related to post-traumatic stress or traumatic brain injury, and for other purposes.

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 “Pups for Patriots Act
3 of 2017”.

4 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

5 Congress makes the following findings:

6 (1) According to the Department of Veterans
7 Affairs about 11 to 20 of every 100 veterans (11 to
8 20 percent) who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom
9 or in Operation Enduring Freedom are diagnosed
10 with post-traumatic stress.

11 (2) The invisible wounds of war, including post-
12 traumatic stress, can cause debilitating symptoms in
13 veterans leading to depression, social isolation, and
14 suicide.

15 (3) Studies and first-hand accounts dem-
16 onstrate that service dogs provide support to vet-
17 erans by mitigating their disability, allowing for pro-
18 fessional and social reintegration.

19 (4) Service dogs reduce stress and anxiety lev-
20 els, ease depression, provide comfort, and restore
21 confidence in affected veterans.

22 (5) Currently, waiting lists for service dogs av-
23 erage between 18 and 24 months, with intensive
24 compulsory training costing an average of \$25,000
25 per service dog.

1 (6) The estimated cost of owning a service dog
2 once adopted is \$1,200 to \$1,600 per year for food,
3 supplies, and general veterinary health care.

4 **SEC. 3. PILOT PROGRAM.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
6 shall carry out a pilot program under which the Secretary
7 shall—

8 (1) enter into contracts with qualified nonprofit
9 organizations for the provision of service dogs to eli-
10 gible veterans, including the procurement, training,
11 and evaluation of each such service dog;

12 (2) ensure that each dog provided as a service
13 dog under the program meets the standards de-
14 scribed in section 4(b); and

15 (3) provide veterinary insurance for each service
16 dog provided to an eligible veteran pursuant to such
17 a contract.

18 (b) ELIGIBLE VETERANS.—In this section, an eligible
19 veteran is a veteran who—

20 (1) served on active duty in the Armed Forces
21 on or after September 11, 2001;

22 (2) has been diagnosed with severe or extreme
23 post-traumatic stress or with a severe traumatic
24 brain injury by a Department of Veterans Affairs

1 doctor or clinical social worker who has treated the
2 veteran;

3 (3) has received evidence-based treatment and
4 remains symptomatic of severe or extreme post-trau-
5 matic stress or severe traumatic brain injury, as de-
6 termined by the Secretary or a Department doctor
7 or clinical social worker; and

8 (4) commits to an evaluation by a Department
9 doctor or clinical social worker at a minimum of two
10 times per year.

11 (c) RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER BENEFITS.—A service
12 dog provided to a veteran pursuant to a contract under
13 the pilot program shall be in addition to all other benefits
14 and services for which the veteran is eligible under the
15 laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

16 (d) QUALIFIED NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.—For
17 purposes of the pilot program under this section, a quali-
18 fied nonprofit organization is a nonprofit organization
19 that the Secretary determines adheres to the national
20 standards for the selection, training, and assessment of
21 service dogs for veterans described in section 4(b).

22 (e) ANNUAL REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Not later
23 than one year after the date on which the pilot program
24 commences, and annually thereafter until the termination
25 of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit to the

1 Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House
2 of Representatives a report on the pilot program. Each
3 such report shall include an evaluation of the pilot pro-
4 gram based on—

5 (1) an update on the nonprofit organizations
6 with which the Secretary has entered into a con-
7 tract;

8 (2) summaries from the Department doctors
9 and clinical social workers who are evaluating the el-
10 igible veterans who receive service dogs under the
11 pilot program; and

12 (3) an analysis of each eligible veteran's ability
13 to professionally and socially reintegrate, to reduce
14 dependence on prescriptive medications, and on rel-
15 evant metrics pertaining to the veteran's diagnosis
16 of a mental health mobility disorder related to post-
17 traumatic stress or a traumatic brain injury.

18 (f) LIMITATION ON PAYMENT OF EXPENSES.—The
19 contract between the Secretary and a qualified nonprofit
20 organization under this section shall not provide for a pay-
21 ment to the organization in an amount in excess of
22 \$25,000 for each service dog provided under the contract,
23 including the procurement, training, and evaluation of the
24 service dog.

1 (g) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
2 authorized to be appropriated for each of fiscal years 2018
3 through 2023 \$7,500,000 to carry out the pilot program.

4 (h) OFFSET.—The amounts otherwise authorized to
5 be appropriated for the Department of Veterans Affairs
6 Office of Human Resources and Administration for each
7 of fiscal years 2018 through 2023 shall be reduced by
8 \$7,500,000.

9 (i) TERMINATION.—The authority of the Secretary to
10 enter into a contract under this section shall terminate
11 on the date that is five years after the date of enactment
12 of this Act.

13 **SEC. 4. NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR SELECTION, TRAINING,**
14 **AND ASSESSMENT OF SERVICE DOGS.**

15 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-
16 ings:

17 (1) At a convening facilitated by the National
18 Association of Veteran-Serving Organizations, a sci-
19 entific advisory committee was formed and developed
20 national standards on the selection, training, and as-
21 sessment of service dogs to enhance public safety,
22 the humane treatment of service dogs, and reliable
23 task performance for veterans.

24 (2) The national standards are publically avail-
25 able and may be subject to revision following a sam-

1 ple study and an annual review by the scientific ad-
2 visory committee.

3 (b) STANDARDS.—The national standards for selec-
4 tion, training, and assessment of service dogs described
5 in this section are the following:

6 (1) With respect to canine breed and size, serv-
7 ice dogs should not be restricted by breed or size as
8 the needs of individual veterans vary according to
9 mobility and lifestyle.

10 (2) With respect to canine selection and
11 health—

12 (A) breeds and lines within the breed
13 should be evaluated to ensure a long service life
14 for a working animal;

15 (B) service dog candidates should have a
16 thorough examination performed by a veteri-
17 narian;

18 (C) examinations should include radiog-
19 raphy of the hips and elbows as a predictor of
20 future joint and arthritic issues, and vision and
21 hearing tests;

22 (D) service dogs should receive regular
23 wellness exams and vaccinations as rec-
24 ommended by a veterinarian, be on year-round

1 internal and external parasite control; and be
2 spayed or neutered; and

3 (E) service dog candidates should have a
4 stable, calm temperament.

5 (3) With respect to canine training tasks, serv-
6 ice dogs should be able to perform a minimum of
7 two tasks that directly relate to the veteran's dis-
8 ability.

9 (4) With respect to canine training methods
10 and equipment—

11 (A) service dogs should perform tasks with
12 alacrity and show a desire to work;

13 (B) training equipment used must be ap-
14 propriate for the breed and dog, fitted, and
15 used correctly; and

16 (C) electronic collars are not acceptable as
17 a humane training tool.

18 (5) With respect to handler training—

19 (A) handlers should be educated on the
20 fundamentals of dog care and the humane
21 treatment of animals, including health care, nu-
22 tritious diet, regular exercise, and the absence
23 of physical pain and stress; and

24 (B) handlers must be educated on legal
25 rights according to the Americans with Disabil-

1 ities Act, Air Carrier Access Act, and Fair
2 Housing Act, among others.

3 (6) With respect to service dog assessments,
4 service dogs and their respective veterans should be
5 observed in action in a public settings that provide
6 common distractions such as food, noise, crowds,
7 and other animals.

8 (7) With respect to the background and role of
9 an assessor—

10 (A) an assessor should support and coach
11 the veteran to successfully partner with the vet-
12 eran's service dog;

13 (B) an assessor should have a background
14 in service dog training and evaluation and be
15 experienced in working with persons with post-
16 traumatic stress; and

17 (C) an assessor should evaluate whether
18 the service dog is temperamentally suitable for
19 the work as a service dog.

20 (c) SERVICE DOG CREDENTIAL.—The Secretary of
21 Veterans Affairs shall issue to an eligible veteran who is
22 provided a service dog under the pilot program under sec-
23 tion 3 with a national service dog credential if the veteran
24 provides to the Secretary each of the following:

1 (1) A certificate that the veteran has success-
2 fully completed an assessment that meets the cri-
3 teria under subsection (b)(6).

4 (2) Proof of a diagnosis, as described in section
5 3(b)(2), from a Department doctor or clinical social
6 worker.

7 (3) A note from a Department doctor or clinical
8 social worker that includes a recommendation that
9 the veteran have a service dog.

10 (4) A copy of the vaccination records of the vet-
11 eran's service dog and a note from the veterinarian
12 who has treated the service dog affirming that the
13 dog is healthy enough to be a service dog.

14 (5) A list of tasks prepared by whom that the
15 service dog is able to perform that are directly re-
16 lated to the veteran's diagnosis as determined by the
17 Department doctor or clinical social worker who
18 made the veteran's diagnosis.