

114TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. _____

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 SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mrs. FISCHER (for herself and Mr. BOOKER) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and 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. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Puppies Assisting
5 Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) Act of 2016”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) An estimated 14 percent of members of the
9 Armed Forces returning from active duty service in

1 support of Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation
2 Enduring Freedom suffer from post-traumatic stress
3 disorder.

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

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

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

16 **SEC. 3. PILOT PROGRAM ON PROVISION BY DEPARTMENT**
17 **OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OF SERVICE DOGS TO**
18 **CERTAIN VETERANS WITH SEVERE POST-**
19 **TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER.**

20 (a) PILOT PROGRAM.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
22 Affairs, acting through the Office of Patient Cen-
23 tered Care and Cultural Transformation of the De-
24 partment of Veterans Affairs, shall carry out a pilot

1 program under which the Secretary provides service
2 dogs to eligible veterans.

3 (2) VETERINARY INSURANCE.—The Secretary
4 shall furnish veterinary health insurance for each
5 service dog provided to an eligible veteran under the
6 pilot program.

7 (b) ELIGIBILITY.—

8 (1) INITIAL ELIGIBILITY.—A veteran is eligible
9 for a service dog under the pilot program if the vet-
10 eran—

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

15 (B) has completed an established evidence-
16 based treatment for post-traumatic stress dis-
17 order and remains significantly symptomatic, as
18 evidenced by the Global Assessment of Func-
19 tioning or a similar clinical metric;

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

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

1 (2) ONGOING ELIGIBILITY FOR VETERINARY IN-
2 SURANCE.—To remain eligible to receive veterinary
3 health insurance from the Department for a service
4 dog provided under the pilot program, a veteran
5 shall see a physician at a medical facility of the De-
6 partment who is a primary care provider or mental
7 health care provider not less frequently than once
8 every 90 days.

9 (c) CONTRACT AUTHORITY.—

10 (1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the pilot
11 program, the Secretary shall enter into such con-
12 tracts as may be necessary for the procurement and
13 training of service dogs with appropriate providers
14 that are certified by Assistance Dogs International
15 or a similar organization and that—

16 (A) on average, provide one-on-one train-
17 ing for each service dog for a minimum of 30
18 hours during a period of not less than 90 days,
19 including the provision of a wellness verification
20 from a licensed veterinarian;

21 (B) provide an in-house residential facility
22 at which recipients of service dogs stay for a
23 minimum of ten days and receive not less than
24 30 hours of training with their new service dog;

1 (C) ensure all service dogs trained by the
2 provider pass the American Kennel Club Canine
3 Good Citizen test prior to permanent placement
4 with a recipient; and

5 (D) provide follow-up support service for
6 the life of the service dog.

7 (2) LIMITATION.—The Secretary may not obli-
8 gate or expend more than \$27,000 for the procure-
9 ment and training of any service dog under a con-
10 tract entered into under this subsection.

11 (d) EFFECT ON OTHER TREATMENT.—The provision
12 of a service dog under the pilot program shall be in addi-
13 tion to other types of treatment provided for post-trau-
14 matic stress disorder and shall not replace established
15 treatment modalities.

16 (e) GAO STUDY.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days
18 after the termination of the pilot program under this
19 section, the Comptroller General of the United
20 States shall submit to Congress a report on the pilot
21 program.

22 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-
23 graph (1) shall include—

24 (A) an evaluation of the effectiveness of
25 the pilot program with respect to—

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1 (i) helping veterans with severe post-
2 traumatic stress disorder live normally;

3 (ii) relevant metrics, including reduc-
4 tion in scores under the post-traumatic
5 stress disorder checklist (PCL), improve-
6 ment in psychosocial function, and thera-
7 peutic compliance;

8 (iii) lessening the symptoms of post-
9 traumatic stress disorder; and

10 (iv) reducing the dependence of par-
11 ticipants under the pilot program on pre-
12 scription narcotics and psychotropic medi-
13 cation; and

14 (B) the recommendations of the Comp-
15 troller General with respect to the continuation
16 or expansion of the pilot program.

17 (f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
18 authorized to be appropriated for each of fiscal years 2017
19 through 2022 \$10,000,000 to carry out the pilot program
20 under this section.

21 (g) OFFSET.—The amounts otherwise authorized to
22 be appropriated for the Office of Human Resources and
23 Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs for
24 each of fiscal years 2017 through 2022 shall be reduced
25 by \$10,000,000.

1 (h) TERMINATION.—The authority to carry out the
2 pilot program under this section shall terminate on the
3 date that is five years after the date of the enactment of
4 this Act.