

114TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 359

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

JANUARY 14, 2015

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.

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

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

17 (d) APPROPRIATE NON-GOVERNMENT ENTITIES.—  
18 For purposes of the pilot program, an appropriate non-  
19 government entity is an entity that is certified in the train-  
20 ing and handling of service dogs and that has a training  
21 area that would be appropriate for use in educating vet-  
22 erans with mental health conditions in the art and science  
23 of service dog training and handling. Such training area  
24 shall—

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

3           (2) be wheelchair accessible;

4           (3) include classroom or lecture space;

5           (4) include office space for staff;

6           (5) include a suitable space for storing training  
7 equipment;

8           (6) provide for periodic use of other training  
9 areas for training the dogs with wheelchairs and  
10 conducting other exercises;

11          (7) include outdoor exercise and toileting space  
12 for dogs; and

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

15          (e) DESIGN OF PILOT PROGRAM.—Each contract en-  
16 tered into under subsection (a) shall provide that the non-  
17 government entity shall—

18           (1) ensure that veterans participating in the  
19 program receive training from certified service dog  
20 training instructors;

21           (2) ensure that in selecting assistance dogs for  
22 use in the program, dogs residing in animal shelters  
23 or foster homes are looked at as an option, if appro-  
24 priate, and ensure that all dogs used in the program  
25 have adequate temperament and health clearances;

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

4           (4) ensure that each service dog in training  
5 lives at the pilot program site or a volunteer foster  
6 home in the vicinity of such site while receiving  
7 training;

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

12           (6) ensure that the pilot program is designed  
13 to—

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

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

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

1 (f) ADMINISTRATION.—In order to carry out the pilot  
2 program under section (a), the Secretary of Veterans Af-  
3 fairs shall—

4 (1) administer the program through the Recre-  
5 ation Therapy Service of the Department of Vet-  
6 erans Affairs under the direction of a certified rec-  
7 reational therapist with sufficient administrative ex-  
8 perience to oversee the pilot program; and

9 (2) establish a director of service dog training  
10 with a background working in social services, experi-  
11 ence in teaching others to train service dogs in a vo-  
12 cational setting, and at least one year of experience  
13 working with veterans or active duty service mem-  
14 bers with post-traumatic stress disorder in a clinical  
15 setting.

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

1 (h) 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 (i) 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           (j) 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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