

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 3335

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

JULY 20, 2017

Mr. BILIRAKIS (for himself and Mr. CUELLAR) introduced the following bill;
which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Pups for Patriots Act
5 of 2017”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress makes the following findings:

3 (1) According to the Department of Veterans
4 Affairs about 11 to 20 of every 100 veterans (11 to
5 20 percent) who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom
6 or in Operation Enduring Freedom are diagnosed
7 with post-traumatic stress.

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

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

16 (4) Service dogs reduce stress and anxiety lev-
17 els, ease depression, provide comfort, and restore
18 confidence in affected veterans.

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

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

1 **SEC. 3. PILOT PROGRAM.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
3 shall carry out a pilot program under which the Secretary
4 shall—

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

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

12 (3) provide veterinary insurance for each service
13 dog provided to an eligible veteran pursuant to such
14 a contract.

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

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

19 (2) has been diagnosed with severe or extreme
20 post-traumatic stress or with a severe traumatic
21 brain injury by a Department of Veterans Affairs
22 doctor or clinical social worker who has treated the
23 veteran;

24 (3) has received evidence-based treatment and
25 remains symptomatic of severe or extreme post-trau-
26 matic stress or severe traumatic brain injury, as de-

1 terminated by the Secretary or a Department doctor
2 or clinical social worker; and

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

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

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

17 (e) ANNUAL REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Not later
18 than one year after the date on which the pilot program
19 commences, and annually thereafter until the termination
20 of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit to the
21 Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House
22 of Representatives a report on the pilot program. Each
23 such report shall include an evaluation of the pilot pro-
24 gram based on—

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

4 (2) summaries from the Department doctors
5 and clinical social workers who are evaluating the el-
6 igible veterans who receive service dogs under the
7 pilot program; and

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

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

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

24 (h) OFFSET.—The amounts otherwise authorized to
25 be appropriated for the Department of Veterans Affairs

1 Office of Human Resources and Administration for each
2 of fiscal years 2018 through 2023 shall be reduced by
3 \$7,500,000.

4 (i) **TERMINATION.**—The authority of the Secretary to
5 enter into a contract under this section shall terminate
6 on the date that is five years after the date of enactment
7 of this Act.

8 **SEC. 4. NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR SELECTION, TRAINING,**
9 **AND ASSESSMENT OF SERVICE DOGS.**

10 (a) **FINDINGS.**—Congress makes the following find-
11 ings:

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

19 (2) The national standards are publically avail-
20 able and may be subject to revision following a sam-
21 ple study and an annual review by the scientific ad-
22 visory committee.

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

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

5 (2) With respect to canine selection and
6 health—

7 (A) breeds and lines within the breed
8 should be evaluated to ensure a long service life
9 for a working animal;

10 (B) service dog candidates should have a
11 thorough examination performed by a veteri-
12 narian;

13 (C) examinations should include radiog-
14 raphy of the hips and elbows as a predictor of
15 future joint and arthritic issues, and vision and
16 hearing tests;

17 (D) service dogs should receive regular
18 wellness exams and vaccinations as rec-
19 ommended by a veterinarian, be on year-round
20 internal and external parasite control; and be
21 spayed or neutered; and

22 (E) service dog candidates should have a
23 stable, calm temperament.

24 (3) With respect to canine training tasks, serv-
25 ice dogs should be able to perform a minimum of

1 two tasks that directly relate to the veteran's dis-
2 ability.

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

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

7 (B) training equipment used must be ap-
8 propriate for the breed and dog, fitted, and
9 used correctly; and

10 (C) electronic collars are not acceptable as
11 a humane training tool.

12 (5) With respect to handler training—

13 (A) handlers should be educated on the
14 fundamentals of dog care and the humane
15 treatment of animals, including health care, nu-
16 tritious diet, regular exercise, and the absence
17 of physical pain and stress; and

18 (B) handlers must be educated on legal
19 rights according to the Americans with Disabil-
20 ities Act, Air Carrier Access Act, and Fair
21 Housing Act, among others.

22 (6) With respect to service dog assessments,
23 service dogs and their respective veterans should be
24 observed in action in a public settings that provide

1 common distractions such as food, noise, crowds,
2 and other animals.

3 (7) With respect to the background and role of
4 an assessor—

5 (A) an assessor should support and coach
6 the veteran to successfully partner with the vet-
7 eran's service dog;

8 (B) an assessor should have a background
9 in service dog training and evaluation and be
10 experienced in working with persons with post-
11 traumatic stress; and

12 (C) an assessor should evaluate whether
13 the service dog is temperamentally suitable for
14 the work as a service dog.

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

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

23 (2) Proof of a diagnosis, as described in section
24 3(b)(2), from a Department doctor or clinical social
25 worker.

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

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

8 (5) A list of tasks prepared by whom that the
9 service dog is able to perform that are directly re-
10 lated to the veteran's diagnosis as determined by the
11 Department doctor or clinical social worker who
12 made the veteran's diagnosis.

○