

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1022

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a grant program under which the Secretary shall make grants to private entities for the provision of service dogs to eligible veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 11, 2021

Mr. RUTHERFORD (for himself, Mr. WALTZ, Mr. LAWSON of Florida, Mr. PAPPAS, and Mr. STIVERS) 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 grant program under which the Secretary shall make grants to private entities for the provision of service dogs to eligible veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, 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 “Puppies Assisting
5 Wounded Servicemembers Act of 2021” or the “PAWS
6 Act of 2021”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS; SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

2 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-
3 ings:

4 (1) According to the analyses of veteran suicide
5 published by the Department of Veterans Affairs in
6 August 2016 entitled “Suicide Among Veterans and
7 Other Americans” and in June 2018 entitled “VA
8 National Suicide Data Report”—

9 (A) an average of 20 veterans died by sui-
10 cide each day during 2014;

11 (B) mental health disorders, including
12 major depression and other mood disorders,
13 have been associated with increased risk for sui-
14 cide;

15 (C) the proportion of users of the Veterans
16 Health Administration with mental health con-
17 ditions or substance use disorders increased
18 from approximately 27 percent in 2001 to more
19 than 40 percent in 2014; and

20 (D) overall, suicide rates are highest
21 among patients with mental health and sub-
22 stance use disorder diagnoses who are in treat-
23 ment and lower among those who received a
24 mental health diagnoses but were not at risk
25 enough to require enhanced care from a mental
26 health provider.

1 (2) Pairing a service dog with a veteran costs
2 approximately \$25,000, including training of the
3 service dog as well as training of the veteran with
4 the service dog and follow-up services and support.

5 (3) Organizations like K9s For Warriors and
6 other members of the Association of Service Dog
7 Providers for Military Veterans have proven track-
8 records of training service dogs for veterans with se-
9 vere post-traumatic stress disorder and dramatically
10 improving those veterans' quality of life, ability to
11 re-enter society, and, most importantly, their
12 chances of survival.

13 (4) New, rigorous scientific research provides
14 persuasive weight to the growing anecdotal evidence
15 that service dogs ameliorate the symptoms associ-
16 ated with post-traumatic stress disorder, and in par-
17 ticular, help prevent veteran suicide.

18 (b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
19 gress that the Department of Veterans Affairs must be
20 more effective in its approach to reducing the burden of
21 veteran suicide connected to mental health disorders, in-
22 cluding post-traumatic stress disorder.

1 **SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PROGRAM TO**
2 **PROVIDE GRANTS FOR THE PROVISION OF**
3 **SERVICE DOGS TO CERTAIN VETERANS WITH**
4 **SEVERE POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DIS-**
5 **ORDER.**

6 (a) GRANTS.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
8 Affairs shall make grants to eligible organizations
9 for the purposes of providing service dogs to eligible
10 veterans.

11 (2) AMOUNT OF GRANT.—A grant under this
12 section shall be in an amount not to exceed \$25,000
13 for each eligible veteran paired with a service dog.

14 (b) ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATIONS.—To be eligible to re-
15 ceive a grant under this section, an organization shall—

16 (1) be a nonprofit organization that—

17 (A) provides service dogs to veterans with
18 post-traumatic stress disorder (hereinafter in
19 this section referred to as “PTSD”);

20 (B) meets the publicly available National
21 Standard of the Association of Service Dog
22 Providers for Military Veterans; and

23 (C) has expertise in the unique needs of
24 veterans with PTSD;

25 (2) agree to provide the benefits described in
26 subsection (c) and, if necessary, to cover any costs

1 associated with the provision of such benefits in ex-
2 cess of the amount of the grant;

3 (3) agree to reaccept or replace any service dog
4 the organization provides to a veteran using a grant
5 under this section, if necessary, as determined by
6 the organization and the veteran; and

7 (4) submit to the Secretary an application con-
8 taining such information, certification, and assur-
9 ances as the Secretary may reasonably require.

10 (c) BENEFITS TO BE PROVIDED USING GRANT
11 FUNDS.—An organization that receives a grant under
12 subsection (a) shall use the grant to—

13 (1) provide a service dog for each eligible vet-
14 eran participating in the program;

15 (2) for each service dog provided, to provide—

16 (A) commercially available or government-
17 guaranteed veterinary health insurance to main-
18 tain the health of the dog and keep the dog
19 functioning in the prescribed role for the life of
20 the dog; and

21 (B) hardware, or repairs or replacements
22 for hardware, that are clinically determined to
23 be required by the dog to perform the tasks
24 necessary to assist the veteran with the diag-
25 nosed disorder of the veteran; and

1 (3) cover the cost of any travel expenses for the
2 veteran to obtain the dog, calculated in the same
3 manner as similar travel expenses provided pursuant
4 to section 111 of title 38, United States Code.

5 (d) TRAVEL EXPENSES FOR REPLACEMENT DOGS.—

6 If a veteran replaces a service dog provided pursuant to
7 a grant under this section, the Secretary shall pay an addi-
8 tional amount for such the travel expenses, to be cal-
9 culated in the same manner as similar travel expenses pro-
10 vided pursuant to section 111 of title 38, United States
11 Code. Such payment shall be in addition to any other ben-
12 efits the veteran receives for the first service dog provided
13 under this section.

14 (e) ELIGIBLE VETERANS.—

15 (1) INITIAL ELIGIBILITY.—For purposes of this
16 section, an eligible veteran is a veteran who—

17 (A) is enrolled in the patient enrollment
18 system of the Department of Veterans Affairs
19 under section 1705 of title 38, United States
20 Code;

21 (B) has been treated and has completed an
22 established evidence-based treatment for PTSD
23 yet remains diagnosed with PTSD by a quali-
24 fied health care provider, as rated on the post-
25 traumatic stress disorder checklist (PCL-5);

1 (C) the health care provider or clinical
2 team of the Department of Veterans Affairs
3 that is treating the veteran for such disorder
4 determines, based upon medical judgment, that
5 the veteran may potentially benefit from a serv-
6 ice dog; and

7 (D) agrees to successfully complete train-
8 ing provided by an eligible organization in con-
9 junction with the receipt of a service dog.

10 (2) ONGOING ELIGIBILITY.—To remain eligible
11 to participate in the program, a veteran shall see the
12 health care provider or clinical team of the Depart-
13 ment of Veterans Affairs treating the veteran for
14 such a disorder at least once every six months to de-
15 termine, based on a clinical evaluation of efficacy,
16 whether the veteran continues to benefit from a
17 service dog.

18 (3) OTHER CASES.—If at any point, the veteran
19 is no longer able or willing to care for the service
20 dog, the organization that provided the service dog
21 and the veteran shall determine the appropriate re-
22 course to ensure the safety of both the veteran and
23 the service dog.

24 (f) APPROVAL OF GRANT APPLICATIONS.—The Sec-
25 retary of Veterans Affairs may review an application sub-

mitted by an eligible organization for a grant under this section only after the organization accepts an eligible veteran into an appropriate program. The Secretary shall approve or deny such an application not later than 90 days after the date on which an eligible organization applies to participate under this section on behalf of an eligible veteran.

(g) RELATIONSHIP TO DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS BENEFITS.—The provision of a service dog to a veteran under this section is in addition to any other hospital care or medical service furnished by the Department for that veteran for PTSD. An improvement in symptoms as a result of the provision of a service dog shall not affect the eligibility of the veteran for any other benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary.

(h) METRICS.—In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall—

(1) develop metrics and other appropriate means to measure, with respect to veterans participating in the program, the improvement in psychosocial function and therapeutic compliance of such veterans and changes with respect to the dependence on prescription narcotics and psychotropic medication of such veterans; and

1 (2) establish processes to document and track
2 the progress of such veterans under the program in
3 terms of the benefits and improvements noted as a
4 result of the program.

5 (i) GAO BRIEFING AND STUDY.—

6 (1) BRIEFING.—Not later than one year after
7 the date on which the Secretary commences the
8 grant program under this section, the Comptroller
9 General of the United States shall provide to the
10 Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of
11 Representatives and the Senate a briefing on the
12 methodology established for the program.

13 (2) REPORT.—Not later than 270 days after
14 the date on which the grant program under this sec-
15 tion terminates, the Comptroller General shall sub-
16 mit to the committees specified in paragraph (1) a
17 report on the program. Such report shall include an
18 evaluation of the approach and methodology used for
19 the program with respect to—

20 (A) helping veterans with severe PTSD re-
21 turn to civilian life;

22 (B) relevant metrics, including any reduc-
23 tion in metrics, including reduction in scores
24 under the post-traumatic stress disorder check-

1 list (PCL-5), improvement in psychosocial
2 function, and therapeutic compliance; and

3 (C) reducing the dependence of partici-
4 pants on prescription narcotics and psycho-
5 tropic medication.

6 (j) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
7 authorized to be appropriated for the period of fiscal year
8 2021 through fiscal year 2024, \$10,000,000 to carry out
9 the program under this section.

10 (k) TERMINATION.—The authority to carry out a
11 program under this section shall terminate on the date
12 that is 3 years after the date of the enactment of this
13 Act. An eligible veteran in possession of a service dog fur-
14 nished under the program as of the date of the termi-
15 nation of the program may keep the service dog after the
16 termination of the program for the life of the dog.

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