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H.B. No. 2951

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to the establishment of a service dog pilot program for certain veterans.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Subchapter A, Chapter 434, Government Code, is amended by adding Section 434.029 to read as follows:

Sec. 434.029. SERVICE DOG PILOT PROGRAM FOR CERTAIN VETERANS. (a) In this section:

(1) "Commission" means the Texas Veterans Commission.

(2) "Pilot program" means the pilot program established under this section.

(3) "Veteran" means an individual who has served in:

(A) an active or reserve component of the army, navy, air force, coast guard, space force, or marine corps of the United States; or

(B) the Texas National Guard, as defined by Section 431.001.

(b) The commission by rule shall establish a pilot program for veterans to assist in mitigating the symptoms of military service-related post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, or military sexual trauma through the provision of a service dog.

(c) The commission shall issue a request for proposals from nonprofit corporations to provide trained service dogs and training

1 and services to veterans who participate in the pilot program.

2 (d) The commission shall approve one or more nonprofit
3 corporations to provide services through the pilot program. The
4 commission may not approve a nonprofit corporation unless the
5 corporation:

6 (1) has demonstrated experience working with veterans
7 who have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic
8 brain injury, or military sexual trauma;

9 (2) is authorized to conduct business in this state;

10 (3) is able to provide follow-up services to a veteran
11 who participates in the pilot program and the veteran's service
12 dog; and

13 (4) adheres to the standards of Assistance Dogs
14 International.

15 (e) A nonprofit corporation that is approved to provide
16 services under the pilot program shall:

17 (1) employ professional staff to train dogs to become
18 service dogs for veterans participating in the pilot program;

19 (2) provide each veteran participating in the pilot
20 program a fully trained service dog;

21 (3) instruct each veteran participating in the pilot
22 program on maintaining the service dog's health and training;

23 (4) while a veteran is participating in the pilot
24 program, ensure that regular mental health and depression
25 assessments are conducted on the veteran; and

26 (5) be able to provide a veteran participating in the
27 pilot program a new service dog if the veteran's service dog:

1 (A) is incompatible with the veteran; or

2 (B) dies or is otherwise unable to fulfill the
3 dog's duty as a service dog before the fourth anniversary of the
4 date the veteran received the service dog under the pilot program.

5 (f) All goods and services provided to a veteran as part of
6 the pilot program, including a veteran's service dog, must be
7 provided at no cost to the veteran.

8 (g) A service dog provided by a nonprofit corporation as
9 part of the pilot program must:

10 (1) complete a training program accredited by
11 Assistance Dogs International;

12 (2) comply with any requirements of the Americans with
13 Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Section 12101 et seq.); and

14 (3) be evaluated by a veterinarian to ensure the dog is
15 medically fit to serve as a service dog.

16 (h) The commission may accept gifts, grants, and donations
17 to fund the pilot program.

18 (i) Not later than October 1, 2026, the commission shall
19 prepare and submit a report evaluating the pilot program to the
20 governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house of
21 representatives, and appropriate standing committees of the
22 legislature. The report must include:

23 (1) recommendations for legislative or other action;
24 and

25 (2) an evaluation of the pilot program's
26 effectiveness, including a recommendation on whether the pilot
27 program should be continued, expanded, or terminated.

1 (j) The pilot program concludes and this section expires
2 September 1, 2027.

3 SECTION 2. The Texas Veterans Commission shall adopt rules
4 to administer the pilot program established under Section 434.029,
5 Government Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable after
6 the effective date of this Act.

7 SECTION 3. This Act takes effect September 1, 2023.