

By: Buckley

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, 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, and military sexual trauma;

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

10 (3) is able to serve all veterans participating in the  
11 pilot program, including by providing necessary transportation for  
12 a veteran to receive pilot program services;

13 (4) is part of a referral network dedicated to  
14 providing wraparound veteran support services, including  
15 counseling, caregiver and family support services, and legal aid;  
16 and

17 (5) adheres to the standards of the Association of  
18 Service Dog Providers for Military Veterans.

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

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

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

25 (3) cover the costs of travel, lodging, and meals for  
26 each veteran participating in the pilot program when the veteran is  
27 traveling for the program;

1           (4) provide peer-supported training to help pair each  
2 veteran participating in the pilot program with a service dog;

3           (5) while a veteran is participating in the pilot  
4 program, ensure that regular mental health and depression  
5 assessments are conducted on the veteran in coordination with a  
6 licensed clinical mental health provider;

7           (6) ensure that wraparound support services are  
8 provided to each veteran participating in the pilot program, the  
9 veteran's caregiver, and the veteran's family before, during, and  
10 after the period when the veteran receives a service dog; and

11           (7) be able to provide a veteran participating in the  
12 pilot program a new service dog if the veteran's service dog:

13                   (A) is incompatible with the veteran, the  
14 veteran's caregiver, or the veteran's family; or

15                   (B) dies or is otherwise unable to fulfill the  
16 dog's duty as a service dog.

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

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

22                   (1) complete a training program accredited by the  
23 Association of Service Dog Providers for Military Veterans or  
24 Assistance Dogs International;

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

27                   (3) be evaluated by a veterinarian to ensure the dog is

1 medically fit to serve as a service dog.

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

4 (i) Not later than October 1, 2026, the commission shall  
5 prepare and submit a report evaluating the pilot program to the  
6 governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house of  
7 representatives, and appropriate standing committees of the  
8 legislature. The report must include:

9 (1) recommendations for legislative or other action;  
10 and

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

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

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

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