

1-1 By: Buckley, et al. (Senate Sponsor - Hancock) H.B. No. 2951
1-2 (In the Senate - Received from the House May 8, 2023;
1-3 May 10, 2023, read first time and referred to Committee on Veteran
1-4 Affairs; May 16, 2023, reported favorably by the following vote:
1-5 Yeas 5, Nays 0; May 16, 2023, sent to printer.)

1-6 COMMITTEE VOTE

	Yea	Nay	Absent	PNV
1-7				
1-8	X			
1-9	X			
1-10	X			
1-11	X			
1-12			X	
1-13			X	
1-14	X			

1-15 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
1-16 AN ACT

1-17 relating to the establishment of a service dog pilot program for
1-18 certain veterans.

1-19 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

1-20 SECTION 1. Subchapter A, Chapter 434, Government Code, is
1-21 amended by adding Section 434.029 to read as follows:

1-22 Sec. 434.029. SERVICE DOG PILOT PROGRAM FOR CERTAIN
1-23 VETERANS. (a) In this section:

1-24 (1) "Commission" means the Texas Veterans Commission.

1-25 (2) "Pilot program" means the pilot program
1-26 established under this section.

1-27 (3) "Veteran" means an individual who has served in:

1-28 (A) an active or reserve component of the army,
1-29 navy, air force, coast guard, space force, or marine corps of the
1-30 United States; or

1-31 (B) the Texas National Guard, as defined by
1-32 Section 431.001.

1-33 (b) The commission by rule shall establish a pilot program
1-34 for veterans to assist in mitigating the symptoms of military
1-35 service-related post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain
1-36 injury, or military sexual trauma through the provision of a
1-37 service dog.

1-38 (c) The commission shall issue a request for proposals from
1-39 nonprofit corporations to provide trained service dogs and training
1-40 and services to veterans who participate in the pilot program.

1-41 (d) The commission shall approve one or more nonprofit
1-42 corporations to provide services through the pilot program. The
1-43 commission may not approve a nonprofit corporation unless the
1-44 corporation:

1-45 (1) has demonstrated experience working with veterans
1-46 who have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic
1-47 brain injury, or military sexual trauma;

1-48 (2) is authorized to conduct business in this state;

1-49 (3) is able to provide follow-up services to a veteran
1-50 who participates in the pilot program and the veteran's service
1-51 dog; and

1-52 (4) adheres to the standards of Assistance Dogs
1-53 International.

1-54 (e) A nonprofit corporation that is approved to provide
1-55 services under the pilot program shall:

1-56 (1) employ professional staff to train dogs to become
1-57 service dogs for veterans participating in the pilot program;

1-58 (2) provide each veteran participating in the pilot
1-59 program a fully trained service dog;

1-60 (3) instruct each veteran participating in the pilot
1-61 program on maintaining the service dog's health and training;

2-1 (4) while a veteran is participating in the pilot
2-2 program, ensure that regular mental health and depression
2-3 assessments are conducted on the veteran; and

2-4 (5) be able to provide a veteran participating in the
2-5 pilot program a new service dog if the veteran's service dog:

2-6 (A) is incompatible with the veteran; or

2-7 (B) dies or is otherwise unable to fulfill the
2-8 dog's duty as a service dog before the fourth anniversary of the
2-9 date the veteran received the service dog under the pilot program.

2-10 (f) All goods and services provided to a veteran as part of
2-11 the pilot program, including a veteran's service dog, must be
2-12 provided at no cost to the veteran.

2-13 (g) A service dog provided by a nonprofit corporation as
2-14 part of the pilot program must:

2-15 (1) complete a training program accredited by
2-16 Assistance Dogs International;

2-17 (2) comply with any requirements of the Americans with
2-18 Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Section 12101 et seq.); and

2-19 (3) be evaluated by a veterinarian to ensure the dog is
2-20 medically fit to serve as a service dog.

2-21 (h) The commission may accept gifts, grants, and donations
2-22 to fund the pilot program.

2-23 (i) Not later than October 1, 2026, the commission shall
2-24 prepare and submit a report evaluating the pilot program to the
2-25 governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house of
2-26 representatives, and appropriate standing committees of the
2-27 legislature. The report must include:

2-28 (1) recommendations for legislative or other action;
2-29 and

2-30 (2) an evaluation of the pilot program's
2-31 effectiveness, including a recommendation on whether the pilot
2-32 program should be continued, expanded, or terminated.

2-33 (j) The pilot program concludes and this section expires
2-34 September 1, 2027.

2-35 SECTION 2. The Texas Veterans Commission shall adopt rules
2-36 to administer the pilot program established under Section 434.029,
2-37 Government Code, as added by this Act, as soon as practicable after
2-38 the effective date of this Act.

2-39 SECTION 3. This Act takes effect September 1, 2023.

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