
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anthony Portantino, Chair
2019 - 2020 Regular Session

SB 312 (Leyva) - Veterans: service dog assistance

Version: April 22, 2019

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: May 13, 2019

Policy Vote: V.A. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Debra Cooper

Bill Summary: SB 312 would require the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) to establish a grant program to provide assistance for the cost of service dogs to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Fiscal Impact:

- One-time costs to CalVet to develop regulations for the administration of the grant program. (GF)
- CalVet would require \$243,000 in the first year and \$232,000 ongoing for additional personnel to develop and administer the grant program. (GF)
- Unknown, significant costs to fund the grants. Training a service dog can range from \$20,000 to \$27,000 per service dog. This grant would cover the purchase, training, equipment, and veterinary needs for an unspecified number of service dogs. The costs would likely be in the millions of dollars to provide assistance for the cost of an adequate number of service dogs for veterans with PTSD. (GF)

Background: According to a 2016 report from the RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research, nearly 20 percent of the veterans who served in either Iraq or Afghanistan suffer from either major depression or PTSD.

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a service dog is one that has been trained and certified to work with people with disabilities and perform tasks related to the person's disability. Service dogs for veterans with PTSD can be trained to enter a room ahead of their handler to turn on lights, retrieve items from a distance, interrupt nightmares and anxious behaviors, as well as perform positional commands that help their handler feel more comfortable in public. Currently, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides service dogs only for veterans with certain physical disabilities. However, a research study was mandated in the Department of Defense Bill of 2010, to examine the effectiveness of service and emotional support dogs for veterans with PTSD.

The VA Mental Health Mobility Service Dog Initiative, is offered for veterans with substantial mobility limitations associated with a mental health disorder. It provides comprehensive coverage for the canine's health and wellness and any prescription medications necessary to enable the dog to perform its duties in service to the veteran.

Proposed Law: This bill would require CalVet, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to establish a grant program to provide assistance for the cost of service dogs to veterans with PTSD. Specifically, this bill would:

- Authorize CalVet to cover reasonable administrative costs using appropriated funds;
- Require the competitive grants to be awarded to certified veteran service dog providers, as defined, that provide services including, but not limited to the purchase of the dog, training of the dog, equipment for the dog, and veterinarian services for the dog;
- Require competitive grants to be awarded in support of the state's strategic plan for providing veterans with mental health assistance;
- Require CalVet to publicize the services provided by recipients of grants to disabled veterans;
- Require CalVet, no later than July 1, 2021, to develop regulations for the grant program including, but not limited to, the application criteria, application process, data collection, and accountability for program expenditures and metrics for evaluation of assistance provided;
- Require CalVet, on and after December 1, 2021, to accept and either approve or reject applications to certify veteran service dog providers. A certification approved by CalVet shall be valid for three years after the date the department accepts credentials for certification, unless the CalVet decertifies the veteran service dog provider;
- Require CalVet to maintain a list of certified veteran service dog providers on its internet website, including the type of services provided by each provider;
- Require CalVet, on or before March 1, 2021, to provide a progress report to the Legislature on its implementation of the grant program;
- Authorize other departments or agencies to use CalVet's certification.

Related Legislation:

SB 245 (Chang, 2019) would prohibit a public animal shelter from charging an adoption fee for a dog or cat if the person adopting the animal presents a current and valid driver's license or identification card with the word "VETERAN" printed on its face.

AB 1618 (Cervantes, Chapter 416, Statutes of 2017), established a competitive grant program for California veteran service providers (VSPs) and a process for certifying VSPs applying for the competitive grants.

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