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THIRD READING

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Bill No: SB 312  
Author: Leyva (D)  
Amended: 4/22/19  
Vote: 21

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SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 4/23/19  
AYES: Archuleta, Grove, Hurtado, Nielsen, Roth, Umberg, Wilk

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 6-0, 5/16/19  
AYES: Portantino, Bates, Bradford, Hill, Jones, Wieckowski

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**SUBJECT:** Veterans: service dog assistance

**SOURCE:** USA Strong for Veterans

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**DIGEST:** This bill requires 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).

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes CalVet within state government and sets forth its powers and duties, including, but not limited to, the administration of various programs providing benefits to veterans.
- 2) Authorizes CalVet to contract with veterans service organizations (VSOs) and compensate the VSO for services within the scope of this section rendered by VSO to any veteran, dependent, or survivor.
- 3) Finds and declares that services provided by VSOs play an important role in the CalVet's responsibilities to assist veterans and their dependents and survivors in presenting and pursuing claims against the United States, and that it is an

efficient and reasonable use of state funds to provide compensation to VSOs for these services.

- 4) Finds and declares that contracts shall not be undertaken until the annual budget for county veterans service officers (CVSOs) reaches a minimum of five million dollars (\$5,000,000).

This bill:

- 1) Requires CalVet, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to establish a competitive grant program to provide assistance for the cost of service dogs to veterans with PTSD.
- 2) Awards grants to certified veteran service dog providers, as defined, that provide services including, among other things, the purchase of the dog, training of the dog, and equipment for the dog.
- 3) Requires CalVet to publicize the program.
- 4) Requires a veteran service dog provider to meet specified criteria to become certified, including, among other things, that the provider demonstrates the knowledge, experience, and cultural competency to provide veterans with service dogs.
- 5) Makes a certification valid for 3 years, unless the department decertifies the service dog provider.
- 6) Requires CalVet to send a progress report on the implementation of these provisions to the Legislature on or before March 1, 2021.
- 7) Requires CalVet to develop regulations for implementation by no later than July 21, 2021.

## **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.

[NOTE: See the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee analysis for a detailed background of this bill.]

### **Related/Prior Legislation**

SB 245 (Chang, 2019) prohibits 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.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- 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 services dogs for veterans with PTSD.  
(GF)

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 5/16/19)

USA Strong for Veterans (source)

American Legion District 18

American Legion Post 125

American Legion Post 176

American Legion Post 206

American Legion Post 247

American Legion Post 261

American Legion Post 279

American Legion Post 280

American Legion Post 30

American Legion Post 471

American Legion Post 502

American Legion Post 508

American Legion Post 534

American Legion Post 56

American Legion Post 6<sup>th</sup> Area

American Legion Post 70

American Legion Post 78

American Legion Post 790

American Legion Post 817

City Of Glendora

Freedom Dogs

Girl Scout Troop 6674

Kiwanis International Glendora

Rotary Club of Pomona

Town of Bedford, NY

Veterans Canine Intelligence Academy

Several individuals

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 5/16/19)

None received

**ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:** According to the author, “California is home to the greatest number of veterans in the country. These brave men and women risk their lives during their military service and, in some cases, suffer severe trauma that ultimately results in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). When they

return home from service, we must make sure that we are doing everything possible to provide veterans with the necessary support in readjusting to civilian life. Studies show that service dogs have many benefits for veterans returning from service. SB 312 will help to bridge these gaps in our system that currently make it difficult for our veterans with PTSD to be paired with service dogs needed for their safety and independence.”

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5/18/19 10:54:47

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