

SENATE, No. 2491

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MAY 28, 2020

Sponsored by:

Senator ANTHONY M. BUCCO

District 25 (Morris and Somerset)

SYNOPSIS

Requires DHS to provide psychiatric service dogs to first responders, health care workers, and other frontline workers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 **AN ACT** concerning service dogs and supplementing Title 4 of the
2 Revised Statutes.

3
4 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
5 *of New Jersey:*

6
7 1. As used in the act:

8 “Post-traumatic stress disorder” means a mental illness classified
9 within the current version of the American Psychiatric Association
10 Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) with
11 symptoms that include, but are not limited to, anxiety, reclusiveness,
12 night terrors, startle reaction, neurochemical imbalance, dissociative
13 flashback, startle response, sensory overload, social withdrawal,
14 hyper-vigilance, and hallucinations.

15 “Psychiatric service dog” means a dog trained to assist an
16 individual who has a psychiatric or mental disability, including post-
17 traumatic stress disorder.

18
19 2. a. In response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)
20 pandemic, the Department of Human Services shall contract with a
21 recognized service dog training agency or school to provide psychiatric
22 service dogs trained by the agency or school to first responders, health
23 care workers, and other frontline workers suffering from post-traumatic
24 stress disorder due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

25 b. To be eligible to receive a trained psychiatric service dog from
26 the Department of Human Services pursuant to subsection a. of this
27 section, an individual shall:

28 (1) be a State resident;

29 (2) be a first responder, health care worker, or frontline worker;

30 (3) suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and qualify as
31 limited in their ability to function due to mental illness under the
32 Americans with Disabilities Act "Americans with Disabilities Act of
33 1990" (42 U.S.C. s.12101 et seq.) due to the coronavirus disease 2019
34 (COVID-19), as certified by a physician or mental health provider;

35 (4) apply to receive a trained psychiatric service dog on a form
36 and in a manner prescribed by the Commissioner of Human Services;
37 and

38 (5) adhere to the standards established by the commissioner for
39 receiving a trained psychiatric service dog including, but not limited
40 to, providing humane shelter and care for the service dog and obeying
41 all State laws concerning the prevention of cruelty to animals.

42 c. An individual who meets the eligibility requirements of
43 subsection b. of this section shall:

44 (1) be provided with a trained psychiatric service dog, at no cost
45 to the individual;

46 (2) procure a license and register the service dog in the
47 municipality where the individual resides; and

1 (3) be responsible for all costs relating to the dog's shelter and
2 care.

3 d. An individual who receives a psychiatric service dog from the
4 Department of Human Services pursuant to subsection c. of this
5 section shall have the option to maintain ownership of the psychiatric
6 service dog, except that an individual who opts not to maintain
7 ownership of the psychiatric service dog shall return the service dog
8 to the department. The Department of Human Services shall then
9 return the service dog to the training agency or school that trained the
10 dog.

11
12 3. The Commissioner of Human Services, pursuant to the
13 "Administrative Procedures Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et
14 seq.) shall adopt rules and regulations necessary to effectuate the
15 purposes of this act.

16
17 4. This act shall take effect immediately.
18
19

20 STATEMENT

21
22 This bill requires that in response to the coronavirus disease 2019
23 (COVID-19) pandemic, the Department of Human Services (DHS)
24 contract with a recognized service dog training agency or school to
25 provide psychiatric service dogs trained by the agency or school to first
26 responders, health care workers, and other frontline workers suffering
27 from post-traumatic stress disorder due to the pandemic.

28 As used in the bill: "post-traumatic stress disorder" means a
29 mental illness classified within the current version of the American
30 Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental
31 Disorders (DSM) with symptoms that include, but are not limited to,
32 anxiety, reclusiveness, night terrors, startle reaction, neurochemical
33 imbalance, dissociative flashback, startle response, sensory overload,
34 social withdrawal, hyper-vigilance, and hallucinations; and
35 "psychiatric service dog" means a dog trained to assist an individual
36 who has a psychiatric or mental disability, including post-traumatic
37 stress disorder.

38 To be eligible to receive a trained psychiatric service dog from the
39 DHS, an individual must: be a State resident; be a first responder,
40 health care worker, or frontline worker; suffer from post-traumatic
41 stress disorder and qualify as limited in their ability to function due
42 to mental illness under the Americans with Disabilities Act "Americans
43 with Disabilities Act of 1990" due to COVID-19, as certified by a
44 physician or mental health provider; apply to receive a trained
45 psychiatric service dog on a form and in a manner prescribed by the
46 Commissioner of Human Services; and adhere to the standards
47 established by the commissioner for receiving a trained psychiatric
48 service dog including, but not limited to, providing humane shelter

1 and care for the service dog and obeying all State laws concerning
2 the prevention of cruelty to animals.

3 An individual who meets the eligibility requirements of the bill
4 will: be provided with a trained psychiatric service dog, at no cost to
5 the individual; procure a license and register the service dog in the
6 municipality where the individual resides; and be responsible for all
7 costs relating to the dog's shelter and care.

8 An individual who receives a psychiatric service dog from the
9 DHS would have the option to maintain ownership of the psychiatric
10 service dog. If the individual opts not to maintain ownership of the
11 service dog, that individual would return the service dog to the DHS,
12 and the DHS would then return the service dog to the training agency
13 or school that trained the dog.

14 According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America,
15 anxiety disorders, including PTSD, are the most common mental
16 illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults, or 18.1 percent of the
17 population, every year.

18 The COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to increase stress and
19 anxiety, both because of the fear of catching the virus and also
20 because of uncertainty about how the outbreak will affect us socially
21 and economically during the pandemic and for years to come.
22 Individuals who may respond more strongly to the stress of the
23 pandemic include, but are not limited to, older individuals,
24 individuals with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for severe
25 illness from COVID-19, health care workers, first responders,
26 frontline workers, and individuals with PTSD.

27 A service dog is specifically task-trained to help an individual
28 with a disability, including PTSD, that substantially limits one or
29 more life activities. This bill would allow individuals suffering from
30 PTSD due to the COVID-19 pandemic to receive service dogs which
31 can help alleviate the stress, grief, and anxiety, and other PTSD
32 symptoms that they may be experiencing.