



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-4000

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

MAR 26 2015

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The enclosed report responds to House Report 113-102, pages 178-179, accompanying H.R. 1960, the proposed National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, "Therapeutic Service Dog Training Program." The committee requested the Department of Defense study the potential therapeutic effects on the Service members who are conducting the training of service dogs.

There are three studies underway to elucidate and validate the therapeutic Service Dog Training Program (SDTP) to determine whether there are measurable effects from the SDTP as a therapeutic intervention for Service members with posttraumatic stress disorder (with or without traumatic brain injury). The SDTP is one of many approaches being studied for its potential use, alone or in combination with other medical interventions and technologies, to improve treatment outcomes and quality of life for our Service members and their families.

Thank you for your interest in the health and well-being of our Service members, veterans, and their families. A similar letter is being sent to the other congressional defense committees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jessica L. Wright".

Jessica L. Wright

Enclosure:
As stated

cc:
The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member



UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-4000

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MAR 26 2015

The Honorable William M. "Mac" Thornberry
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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cc:
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member



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MAR 26 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman



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MAR 26 2015

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

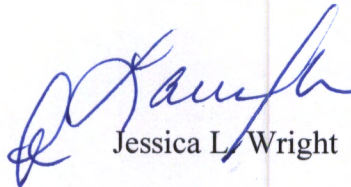
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The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Member



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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-4000

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The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
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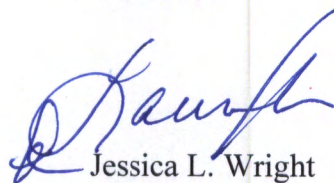
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The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Vice Chairman



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**PERSONNEL AND
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The Honorable Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

MAR 26 2015

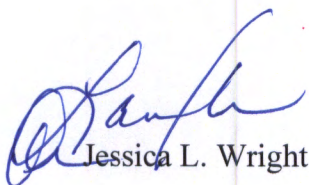
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The Honorable Peter J. Visclosky
Ranking Member

REPORT TO CONGRESS

HOUSE REPORT 113-102, PAGES 178-179, TO ACCOMPANY H.R. 1960, THE PROPOSED NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2014, “THERAPEUTIC SERVICE DOG TRAINING PROGRAM”



This report cost the Department approximately \$2,900 in Fiscal Years 2013-2014. This includes \$2,000 in expenses and \$900 in labor.

Reference ID: 2-9764C5D

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1.0 Purpose

House Report 113-102, pages 178-179, which accompanied H.R. 1960, the proposed National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, “Therapeutic Service Dog training Program,” stated that the Armed Services Committee “is aware that recovering Service members in treatment at the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE) and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC) are reporting improvement in their symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) when participating in the service dog training programs currently operating in those facilities. In addition, clinical observations support the benefits of this animal-assisted therapy modality to psychologically injured Service members including: decreased depressive symptoms, improved emotional regulation, improved sleep patterns, a greater sense of purpose, better reintegration into their communities, pain reduction, and improved parenting skills. The committee urges the Secretary of Defense to consider making this promising new therapeutic intervention more available to Service members suffering from the invisible wounds of PTSD and TBI.” The committee further requested the Secretary of Defense to provide a report not later than March 1, 2015, to update the congressional defense committees on this area of interest.

The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY 2014 provided \$4 million in Defense Health Program Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation funds for a Therapeutic Service Dog Training Program (SDTP). This report addresses the potential therapeutic effect on the Service members who are conducting the training of service dogs.

2.0 Background

In July 2008, Rick Yount, a social worker and certified dog trainer, created the first Warrior dog training program designed to treat the symptoms of PTSD and TBI in veterans and Service members undergoing treatment at a large Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Residential Treatment Facility. In 2009, the program was established at a DoD military medical treatment facility (MTF). In October 2010, a SDTP was developed to support the care of patients being treated at the WRNMMC and NICoE. This program is now offered through a contract with the nonprofit foundation, Warrior Canine Connection (WCC). The program continues to produce anecdotal evidence that participation in the SDTP helps reduce the symptoms associated with PTSD and TBI, particularly in wounded warriors.

Since 2011, and in collaboration with the WCC, more than 3,000 active duty Service members have participated in the SDTP. The SDTP is executed by clinically-experienced professional service canine trainers who teach Service members undergoing treatment for PTSD how to train service dogs. The canines that are trained are then given to other injured Service members or veterans. Service members participating in the SDTP experience the benefits of training and interacting with the service dogs and may be motivated by knowing that the dogs they train will help improve the quality of life of a wounded warrior. The potential motivation to help other wounded Service members, and the development of attention and discipline skills to successfully shape the behavior of the service dogs, appears to contribute to the SDTP participants’ enhanced health and well-being, as well as improved relationships with their

spouses/significant others and children. To date, these encouraging observations regarding participation in the SDTP have not been rigorously evaluated.

A necessary next step is a rigorous systematic review of existing evidence to determine if, in general, contact with service dogs contributes in a beneficial, neutral, or detrimental way to mental health and interpersonal outcomes. This evidence review must be conducted in a manner consistent with the processes detailed by the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality by experienced investigators skilled in evidence review methodology. Such a review will assess both the quality and strength of existing evidence, identify research gaps, and establish needed research designs capable of significantly contributing to a better understanding of this issue.

3.0 Research Efforts

FY14 SDTP Executed by the Uniformed Services University for the Health

Sciences (USUHS): Over the past several months, a consortium of clinicians and researchers from the USUHS, NICoE, WRNMMC, Fort Belvoir Community Hospital (FBCH), National Institutes of Health, University of Maryland, University of North Carolina, and WCC have been evaluating the current state-of-the-science regarding animal therapy, service dogs, advances in TBI and psychological care, and physiologic effects on genetics, proteomics, neuroendocrine function, and pertinent quality of life outcomes (mood, behavior, physical symptomatology, and functionality). This multidisciplinary team conducted literature searches, held focus meetings, and performed statistical calculations to develop a research proposal and study plan for the SDTP.

The purpose of the research project is to elucidate and validate if there are measurable effects from the SDTP as a therapeutic intervention for Service members with PTSD (with or without TBI). If the research project produces validated outcomes data that shows this therapy to be effective, it may provide evidence of an additional non-pharmacological alternative treatment that may be considered, alone or in conjunction with other therapies, for military beneficiaries with PTSD and the population at large.

The investigators plan to begin subject recruitment in the spring of 2015. The study will examine biological (autonomic nervous system regulation and biochemical and genetic expressions profiles), psychological (behavioral health symptoms, post-concussive symptoms, attachment to pets), and social (social function, quality of life, healthcare utilization) efficacy of SDTP for individuals with PTSD symptoms (with or without TBI). Additionally, the study will evaluate the effects of SDTP participation on immediate family members.

Additional Research Efforts: In addition to the USUHS-executed FY 14 program, two studies have received funding to investigate the therapeutic benefit of service dogs.

Funds were awarded to another USUHS research team for a project titled, “Human-Dog Interactions: Neuroendocrine and Physiological Alterations in Service members with PTSD Who Train Service Dogs.” To date, the necessary regulatory reviews have been completed and study participant recruitment began in November 2014. The focus of this two-group study is to evaluate and quantify the anticipated improvement in PTSD

symptoms among Service members. The investigators hypothesize that through the training of dogs, and more broadly, the exposure to the animals and the increased socialization with other humans required by the training activity, a variety of Service members' PTSD symptoms will be impacted positively. Specifically, the investigators predict that Service members will experience an improvement in mood, sleep, psychosocial engagement, brain regulation of psychological arousal levels, and autonomic biological regulation. In addition, the investigators anticipate that Service members will have measureable changes in brain chemicals associated with mood and anxiety control as a result of study participation.

Funds were awarded to the Palo Alto Institute for Research and Education for the project titled, "Can a Canine Companion Modify Cardiac Autonomic Reactivity and Tone in PTSD." The study is currently undergoing regulatory review. This study will focus on determining whether: 1.) those recruited through the VA Hospital in Palo Alto are representative of the larger military PTSD population; 2.) training of service dogs measurably improves cardiac tone and reactivity among the military veteran trainers; and 3.) overall levels of social interaction and cognition demonstrate improvement as a consequence of participation as a trainer of canines.

4.0 Conclusion

The Department is continuously seeking validated PTSD and TBI therapies and preventive measures for the care and protection of our Service members. Therapeutic Service Dog Training is one of many approaches studied for its potential use, alone or in combination with other medical interventions and technologies, to improve the treatment outcomes and the quality of life for our Service members and their families.