

# MEMORANDUM

**Posted:**

**From:** Representative Sue Helm

**To:** All House members

**Subject:** Service Dogs for Veterans

In the near future, I plan to introduce a resolution that urges the United States Veterans Administration to strongly consider service dogs as a recognized therapeutic practice.

Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs will pay for service dogs for veterans who suffer from physical disabilities, such as impaired hearing, vision or mobility. Unfortunately, current federal law does not permit funding for use of these service animals for those suffering from PTSD or other emotional traumas.

Under my proposal, I wish to seek members' assistance in strongly encouraging the United States Congress and the federal VA to recognize and fund the use of these dogs to assist in the healing process for all of our wounded warriors.

I believe providing Veterans with an animal companion to combat PTSD is a noble cause that deserves federal attention. Studies indicate the use of service dogs and companionship of animals can help those suffering from PTSD.

Fortunately, the Department of Veterans Affairs is developing programs that help veterans and animals bond. They are currently conducting a study to test the effects of veterans working with trained service animals. Under this current study, the VA is comparing the benefits of service dogs and emotional support dogs. A service dog is highly trained to perform specific tasks that address the disability, whereas an emotional support dog is a well-behaved pet that provides comfort and companionship.

Furthermore, this study specifically targets the effects of service dogs for veterans with PTSD. The service animals in this study have been trained with five specific commands. These include creating a secure space for veterans, turning on lights, sweeping rooms, as well as bringing items that a veteran may need. These crucial commands may help address core PTSD symptoms such as hyper-vigilance. The VA believes that service animals can serve as a bridge for veterans to get past their initial fears. The goal is for veterans to get out more and engage in therapy so that they can eventually free themselves from any excessive fear response.

I would like to encourage the Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress to look into this study and consider all of the benefits that service dogs can have for the great men and women who have served our nation. It is important that the Department of Veterans Affairs provide the best and most productive healthcare for our veterans.

These service animals can provide an exceptional number of benefits for our veterans. We need to consider to fund them as a necessary part of our veterans healing process. As the greatest nation on earth, we should do everything we can to help our wounded veterans to heal as best they can.

Please join me in sponsoring this very important resolution.