



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

SERVICES, INC.

May 14, 2019

The Honorable John Boozman
Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction
and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
141 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military
Construction
and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
722 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Schatz,

I am writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA) to urge that as you consider FY20 appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), you strike out language in the House Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations for Military Construction, VA, and Related Agencies bill, that would prohibit the VA from conducting vital research involving dogs. The prohibition will not only impede scientific progress but also unnecessarily delay research advances that promote and sustain the health and well-being of our nation's veterans and the larger public.

Based on the conviction that research with nonhuman animals is a necessary component of basic and applied research on health, APA strongly supports humanely conducted, ethically sound, and scientifically valid research with nonhuman animals. APA has a membership of more than 118,400 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students. Our association works to promote the advancement, communication and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives. For nearly 100 years, through its Committee on Animal Research and Ethics, APA has promulgated guidelines for the ethical care and treatment of nonhuman animals in research.

Research with nonhuman animals has and continues to play a critical role in furthering our understanding of health as well as diseases and disorders, many of which afflict both humans and other animals. Based on considerations of particular biological factors, scientists have developed specific animal models to address specific research questions. Dogs are an ideal model for studies of specific issues related to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, narcolepsy, autoimmune functioning, and epilepsy. Given their

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appropriateness for only certain research questions, dogs comprise less than 1 percent of the nonhuman animals involved in VA-funded research.

As you are aware, in the United States, nonhuman animal research is stringently regulated with overlapping systems of oversight at the federal, state, and local institutional levels, which serves to ensure that the research being conducted is ethically sound and scientifically valid and that the animals involved are afforded humane care and treatment. Thus, the research being conducted at VA has undergone a rigorous vetting process and been deemed critical to advancing medical breakthroughs that are critical to the health and wellbeing of our veterans and the public at large. Furthermore, to put it in context, while over 2100 dogs are euthanized in shelters per day, the number of dogs involved in VA research is on average about 100 a year. Although only about 0.014% of the VA research budget is spent on research with dogs, the return on this investment is incredible. To date this research program has been instrumental in development of many therapies and therapeutics including a cardiac pacemaker, non-invasive treatment of intervertebral discs, cough enhancement stimulators for individuals with spinal cord injury, which renders them susceptible to serious respiratory infections, and treatments for narcolepsy. As you may recall, former VA Secretary Shulkin himself reiterated the importance of this research in an editorial in *USA Today* on September 12, 2017 and cautioned about the harm that would befall seriously disabled veterans if canine research and its related medical advancements are no longer an option.

The specific language inserted into the bill that would abolish all research with dogs conducted by the VA, is similar to the language in H.R. 1155 (PUPPERS Act), a bill that reflects a genuine lack of understanding of the scientific process, and at worst an intentional distortion and misrepresentation of facts by proponents of the bill. We believe that an accurate understanding of the nature and value of the research by Congress is essential to ensure that Congress acts in the best interest of our nation's veterans.

If APA can be of further assistance or provide additional information, please contact Sangeeta Panicker, PhD, Director of the APA Research Ethics Office, at spanicker@apa.org or 202.336.6000.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell D. Shilling". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Russell D. Shilling, Ph.D.
Chief Scientific Officer