

SENATE BILL 182

P1

5lr0788

(PRE-FILED)

By: **Senator Simonaire**

Requested: September 10, 2024

Introduced and read first time: January 8, 2025

Assigned to: Education, Energy, and the Environment

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program – Eligibility – Family Members of**
3 **Veterans**

4 FOR the purpose of expanding eligibility for the Maryland Veterans Service Animal
5 Program to include a spouse or dependent of an eligible veteran; and generally
6 relating to the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program.

7 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,

8 Article – State Government

9 Section 9–957

10 Annotated Code of Maryland

11 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

12 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
13 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

14 **Article – State Government**

15 9–957.

16 (a) (1) In this section the following words have the meanings indicated.

17 (2) **“ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBER” MEANS A SPOUSE OR DEPENDENT**
18 **OF AN ELIGIBLE VETERAN.**

19 (3) “Eligible veteran” means an individual who:

20 (i) served on active duty in:

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



- 1 1. the armed forces of the United States;
- 2 2. the National Guard; or
- 3 3. a reserve component of the armed forces of the United
4 States;
- 5 (ii) served in a capacity other than for training;
- 6 (iii) was discharged or released under conditions other than
7 dishonorable; and
- 8 (iv) 1. is a resident of the State; or
9 2. receives treatment or care from a U.S. Department of
10 Veterans Affairs or U.S. Department of Defense medical facility in the State.

11 **[(3)] (4)** “Fund” means the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program
12 Fund established under subsection (f) of this section.

13 **[(4)] (5)** “Nonprofit training entity” means a corporation, a foundation, or
14 any other legal entity that:

- 15 (i) is qualified under § 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code;
- 16 (ii) 1. engages in the training of service dogs or support dogs for
17 use by veterans; or
18 2. uses trained therapy horses for interaction with veterans;
19 and
- 20 (iii) has been selected by the Department to provide services under
21 this section.

22 **[(5)] (6)** “Program” means the Maryland Veterans Service Animal
23 Program established under subsection (b) of this section.

24 **[(6)] (7)** “Program participant” means an eligible veteran **OR ELIGIBLE**
25 **FAMILY MEMBER** who participates in the Program.

26 **[(7)] (8)** “Service dog” means a dog that is individually trained to do work
27 or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including physical,
28 sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.

1 ~~[(8)] (9)~~ “Successful Program participant” means a Program participant
2 who successfully completes the training or therapy protocol specified by a nonprofit training
3 entity.

4 ~~[(9)] (10)~~ “Support dog” means a dog that is individually trained and that
5 serves as an emotional support or therapy animal that a medical professional, within the
6 medical professional’s scope of practice, has determined provides benefit for an individual
7 with a sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.

8 ~~[(10)] (11)~~ “Therapy horse” includes a horse determined appropriate for
9 interactions with veterans by a stable licensed by the State that:

10 (i) is a Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship,
11 International (PATH, Intl.) member center; or

12 (ii) has Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association
13 (EAGALA) certified professionals who provide services to veterans.

14 (b) There is a Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program in the Department.

15 (c) The purposes of the Program are to:

16 (1) refer eligible veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** who inquire
17 about participation in the Program to one or more nonprofit training entities;

18 (2) provide additional funding mechanisms to assist veterans **AND**
19 **ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** participating in the Program;

20 (3) encourage successful Program participants to assist in outreach and
21 referral of other eligible veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** who could benefit
22 from participation in the Program;

23 (4) assist in the reduction of the Maryland veteran suicide rate; and

24 (5) identify potential capital projects and services to facilitate more
25 services for veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** in the State.

26 (d) (1) The Department shall select at least one nonprofit training entity to:

27 (i) implement a training or therapy protocol for the purposes of the
28 Program that will teach each Program participant methodologies, strategies, and
29 techniques for:

30 1. partnering with service dogs or support dogs; or

31 2. interacting with therapy horses;

1 (ii) select qualified Program participants from those eligible
2 veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** referred to the nonprofit entity under the
3 Program;

4 (iii) select an appropriate service dog, support dog, or therapy horse,
5 as applicable, for each Program participant;

6 (iv) facilitate each Program participant's training or therapy using
7 the nonprofit training entity's training or therapy protocol; and

8 (v) unless the nonprofit training entity uses trained therapy horses,
9 partner each successful Program participant with the service dog or support dog on the
10 Program participant's successful completion of the nonprofit training entity's training
11 protocol.

12 (2) To be eligible for selection under paragraph (1) of this subsection, a
13 nonprofit entity must:

14 (i) be based in the State;

15 (ii) serve the needs of the veteran population in the State; and

16 (iii) generate its own revenue and reinvest the proceeds of that
17 revenue in the growth and development of its programs.

18 (e) (1) A nonprofit training entity may disqualify a Program participant from
19 participation in the Program if the nonprofit training entity determines that the Program
20 participant's involvement in the Program:

21 (i) presents a danger to the Program participant's mental or
22 physical well-being;

23 (ii) has caused or may potentially cause harm to others, an animal,
24 or property;

25 (iii) presents a danger to the service dog's, support dog's, or therapy
26 horse's mental or physical well-being; or

27 (iv) does not meet the training requirement of the nonprofit.

28 (2) A Program participant may discontinue involvement in the Program for
29 any reason.

30 (f) (1) There is a Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program Fund.

1 (2) The Department shall use revenue from the Fund to pay a nonprofit
2 training entity.

3 (3) Revenue from the Fund may be used only to pay:

4 (i) a nonprofit training entity; and

5 (ii) administrative costs of the Program.

6 (4) The Secretary, or the Secretary's designee, shall administer the Fund.

7 (5) (i) The Fund is a special, nonlapsing fund that is not subject to §
8 7-302 of the State Finance and Procurement Article.

9 (ii) The State Treasurer shall hold the Fund separately, and the
10 Comptroller shall account for the Fund.

11 (6) The Fund consists of:

12 (i) revenue collected by the Department in the form of donations to
13 the Program;

14 (ii) money appropriated in the State budget to the Fund; and

15 (iii) any other money from any other source accepted for the benefit
16 of the Fund.

17 (7) The State Treasurer shall invest the money of the Fund in the same
18 manner as other State money may be invested.

19 (8) Any interest earnings of the Fund shall be credited to the General Fund
20 of the State.

21 (9) Expenditures from the Fund may be made only in accordance with the
22 State budget.

23 (10) Money expended from the Fund is supplemental to and is not intended
24 to take the place of funding that otherwise would be appropriated for the Program.

25 (g) (1) For the purpose of implementing this section, the Department may
26 accept gifts or grants for donation to the Fund.

27 (2) On or before October 1, 2018, and each October 1 thereafter, the
28 Department shall post and maintain on its website a list containing the names of all
29 persons who have donated to the Fund in the previous year and have authorized the
30 Department to publish their names on its website.

1 (h) The Department shall adopt regulations to implement this section, including
2 regulations establishing procedures for the Department to:

3 (1) promote the Program to eligible veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY**
4 **MEMBERS** through the Department's outreach methods;

5 (2) refer eligible veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** to selected
6 nonprofit entities;

7 (3) receive donations for the Fund through a link placed in a prominent
8 location on the Department's website; and

9 (4) use revenue from the Fund to pay selected nonprofit entities for services
10 that are provided through the Program.

11 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
12 October 1, 2025.