

## Chapter 467

**(Senate Bill 1106)**

AN ACT concerning

**Anne Arundel County and Harford County – Courthouse Dog and Child Witness Pilot Program**

FOR the purpose of establishing the Courthouse Dog and Child Witness Pilot Program in the circuit courts for Anne Arundel County and Harford County; establishing the purpose of the pilot program; requiring the Administrative Office of the Courts to develop a plan to implement the pilot program; requiring the Administrative Office of the Courts to establish certain standards for participants in the program; requiring the Administrative Office of the Courts to establish requirements that a party in a certain proceeding must follow; requiring the Administrative Office of the Courts to make information about the pilot program publicly available; requiring the Administrative Office of the Courts to report annually to the Governor and General Assembly; defining certain terms; providing for the termination of this Act; and generally relating to the Courthouse Dog and Child Witness Pilot Program.

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
That:

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

(2) “Child witness” means a witness who is a minor when the witness testifies in a criminal proceeding.

(3) “Facility dog” means a dog that has:

(i) graduated from a program of an assistance dog organization that trains dogs for the purpose of reducing stress in a child witness;

(ii) received 2 years of training;

(iii) passed the same public access test as a service dog; and

(iv) been teamed with a facility dog handler.

(4) “Facility dog handler” means a person who has received training on:

(i) offering the person’s animal for assistance purposes from an organization accredited by Assistance Dogs International or an equivalent organization; and

(ii) court protocol and policies, including the expected role of an animal assistance team and how not to interfere with evidence collection or the effective administration of justice.

(5) “Therapy dog” means a dog that has:

(i) received training to provide affection and comfort to children who need emotional support; and

(ii) been teamed with a therapy dog handler.

(6) “Therapy dog handler” means a person who has received training on:

(i) offering the person’s animal for assistance purposes from an organization that insures, registers, or certifies therapy dogs and their handlers; and

(ii) court protocol and policies, including the expected role of an animal assistance team and how not to interfere with evidence collection or the effective administration of justice.

(b) There is a Courthouse Dog and Child Witness Pilot Program in the circuit courts for Anne Arundel County and Harford County.

~~(b)~~ (c) The purpose of the pilot program is to determine whether to establish a structured, defined, and systematic approach for providing a courthouse dog to a child witness in any circuit court proceeding in the State.

~~(c)~~ (d) To accomplish the purpose of the pilot program, the Administrative Office of the Courts shall:

(1) develop a plan to implement the pilot program;

~~(2) establish minimum training standards for therapy and facility dogs used in the pilot program;~~

~~(3) establish minimum standards for therapy and facility dog handlers who participate in the program in court protocols and policies, including the expected role of an animal assistance team and how not to interfere with evidence collection or the effective administration of justice;~~

~~(4)~~ (2) establish the procedures that a party in a court proceeding must follow to request that a therapy dog and therapy dog handler or facility dog and facility dog handler assist a child witness; and

~~(5)~~ (3) ensure that the details of the pilot program are publicly available.

~~(d)~~ (e) On or before September 30, 2019, the Administrative Office of the Courts shall report to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2-1246 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly on the operation and results of the pilot program.

~~(e)~~ (f) The Administrative Office of the Courts may adopt rules to implement this section.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2016. It shall remain effective for a period of 3 years and, at the end of September 30, 2019, with no further action required by the General Assembly, this Act shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.

**Approved by the Governor, May 10, 2016.**