

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2020 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 90

(Senator Simonaire)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Health and Government Operations

Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program - Definitions

This bill defines “service dog,” “support dog,” and “therapy horse” for the purposes of the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program and related fund.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill is technical in nature and does not impact State operations or finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Maryland regulations define “service dog” as any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. “Service dog” does not include any other species of animal, either wild, domestic, trained, or untrained. Maryland regulations define “support dog” as a dog that serves as an emotional support animal, comfort animal, or therapy animal that a medical professional has determined provides benefit for an individual with a disability. There is no definition for “therapy horse” in Maryland regulations.

Chapter 416 of 2017 established the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program. The program is designed to refer eligible veterans to selected nonprofit training organizations to be paired with “service dogs” or “support dogs” and facilitate their training. The

Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) must select at least one nonprofit training entity that meets specified qualifications to carry out elements of the program.

Chapter 416 also established the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program Fund, consisting of revenue collected by MDVA in the form of donations to the program, money appropriated in the State budget, and money from any other source accepted for the benefit of the fund. Chapters 152 and 153 of 2018 require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs or the Secretary's designee to administer the fund. Chapter 465 of 2019 expanded the program to include nonprofit training entities that use trained therapy horses for interaction with veterans. Revenue from the fund may be used only to pay a nonprofit training entity and for administrative costs of the program. Expenditures from the fund may be made only in accordance with the State budget.

Background: The fiscal 2020 budget includes \$54,794 in general funds for the program. MDVA advises that, as of December 23, 2019, the program had authorized \$40,000 in disbursements for completion of the program by four participants.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of Legislative Services

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