

PGCEX_FAV_SB455

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Position: FAV



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: Senate Bill 455 – Health - Maryland Children's Service Animal Program - Establishment

SPONSOR: Senator Pinsky, *et al.*

HEARING DATE: February 18, 2020

COMMITTEE: Finance

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 455**, which creates the Maryland Children's Service Animal Program in the Maryland Department of Health to serve the needs of children with a history of trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder. The program will teach children to partner with a service or support dog or to interact with therapy horses.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events occurring before age 18. ACEs include all types of abuse and neglect as well as parental mental illness, substance use, divorce, incarceration, and domestic violence. ACEs significantly increase the variety of negative outcomes in adulthood. It is estimated that approximately 12.5% of American children have experienced at least four Adverse Childhood events.¹ In Maryland, that equates to approximately 167,294 children statewide and 25,241 children in Prince George's County. Animal therapy is promising to deal with short-term issues resulting from trauma.²

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 455** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.

¹ ACEs in young children involved in the child welfare system. Retrieved from <http://www.flcourts.org/core/fileparse.php/517/urlt/ACEsInYoungChildrenInvolveInTheChildWelfareSystem.pdf> (opens in new window); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). About the CDC-Kaiser ACE study: Data and statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>.

² Nimer J., Lundahl B. (2007). Animal-assisted therapy: a meta-analysis. *Anthrozoös* 20, 225–238. 10.2752/089279307X224773

LeClair_FAV_SB455

Uploaded by: LeClair, Danielle

Position: FAV

Testimony in Favor of SB 455 – Maryland Service Animal Program
Submitted by: Danielle LeClair, University Park, MD
Position: Support

Chairwoman Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and fellow Finance Committee members – Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of SB 455, which would establish the Maryland Children’s Service Animal Program in the Maryland Department of Health.

I want to also thank the bill’s lead sponsor, my state Senator Paul Pinsky, and the other sponsors of this bipartisan bill.

My 12 year old daughter and I live in University Park, MD. I adopted my daughter as a single parent almost three years ago from the foster care system. She is a smart and kind girl who has made Honor Roll almost every quarter, is a great athlete, plays the trombone in the school band, and loves animals, especially dogs.

She also has a number of significant mental health issues from the trauma she suffered in her birth and foster homes in the first 9 years of her life. What happened to her during those years which was in no way her fault. But she lives every day with the resulting trauma, and has challenging diagnoses including PTSD.

PTSD is an emotional and psychological – and often physical – reaction to trauma, including repeated childhood abuse. People with PTSD can have flashbacks triggered by a noise, emotion, memory, etc. The person with PTSD can then be brought back to the time of the trauma – i.e. abuse – and truly believe that they are in danger despite currently being safe. As a result, they can lose contact with reality and become violent, believing that they must defend themselves from actual harm despite being in a safe place, or they shut down and become immobile, aka the “freeze” response. Once the person with PTSD is re-regulated or no longer disassociated from their body, they often feel shame and guilt, and sometimes do not even remember their actions during a PTSD episode.

Treatment for PTSD in children – including trauma-focused therapy and neurofeedback - is extremely hard to find in Maryland. While my daughter has an excellent (albeit expensive) therapist and psychiatrist, trauma recovery is a long process and having help in my home in the form of a service dog when she has a PTSD episode would be hugely therapeutic to my daughter and I.

We have some experience with therapy horses so I’m glad that’s part of the bill as well. One of the best and most therapeutic forms of treatment my daughter has received is through the Prince George’s County Equestrian Therapy Program, or PETS. My daughter’s equine therapy last year improved her self-esteem – a key factor in kids who are survivors of abuse – and significantly reduced the duration and frequency of her PTSD episodes while she was riding. In fact, the 4 months she participated in equine therapy last Spring and Summer was the time since I’ve been her mom that my daughter had the fewest number of PTSD episodes.

Regarding the service dog component of the bill, one of the best and most direct and immediate forms of help for people with PTSD – including veterans and children with a history of abuse – is having a trained service dog. I understand that Maryland has already passed a similar law for veterans with PTSD to get better access to service dogs. I hope that you will do the same for children with PTSD in our state by passing SB 455 to help my daughter and many other children with PTSD get on the path to recovery.

Service dogs for people with PTSD are taught behaviors that help people better cope with their fear and anxiety. Service dogs receive specialized training and are protected by the ADA and other disability laws. They are different from therapy dogs and emotional support animals in a number of ways. Unlike therapy or emotional support dogs, service dogs are specially trained to provide a physical barrier between the person with PTSD and others around them during a PTSD episode, provide stress reducing pressure on trained body points, and provide comfort and social help as well. PTSD service dogs can also be trained to protect kids from self-harm, improve sleeping patterns, help wake the child for school, help with medication reminders, and help with public panic prevention. Importantly for my family, service dogs can be trained to alert the child's parent when the child is having a PTSD episode.

So you may ask: why we don't already have a service dog?

The answer is that the current wait to get a service dog is approximately 2 years, based on several service dog trainers that I have spoken to in Maryland and even out of state, as well as a number of service dog training websites.

And the cost to get a service dog is usually around \$20,000. I understand that this kind of specialized training is expensive and the cost is probably justified. I'd be happy to contribute financially to the service dog and fundraise, but my family and many other parents of kids with PTSD do not have, nor can they raise, \$20,000 to get a service dog.

Another challenge in getting a service dog on your own is protecting yourself from scammers. Psychology Today reported that there are a host of sketchy service dog registries, which will apparently fraudulently certify pet dogs as "service animals." While over 20 states now have laws criminalizing the misrepresentation of a dog as a service animal, with all the confusion, it's hard as a parent to know if a dog trainer is legitimate or just taking your money and scamming you. Having access to a service dog through the proposed Maryland Children's Service Animal program would ensure that my daughter and I are not the victims of scams and would instead be getting a properly trained PTSD service dog.

SB 455 will help my daughter by letting her be partnered with a service dog so that she can go from being a scared, sick child to become a healing survivor.

I hope that you will move quickly to a vote in favor of this important bill and to also support other legislation to help families struggling with mental health issues.

Thank you.

MDDC_FWA_SB0455

Uploaded by: London, Rachel

Position: FWA



MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COALITION

Dedicated to the rights and quality of life for people with developmental disabilities in Maryland

Senate Finance Committee

February 18, 2020

SB 455: Health – Maryland Children’s Service Animal Program - Establishment

Position: Support with Amendments



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The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Coalition is comprised of five statewide organizations committed to improving the opportunities and outcomes for Marylanders with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As such, the DD Coalition supports SB 455 with amendments that would ensure access and opportunity for children with developmental disabilities to participate in the Service Animal Program.

Service, support, and therapy animals can play an important role in the lives of people with disabilities, especially children – eliminating barriers, creating opportunities, and promoting independence. Service, support, and therapy animals are trained differently, perform different tasks, and have access to public places at different levels.

A service animal is “any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.” For example, a service animal may safely guide a child who is blind or deaf; alert others to medical emergencies, like seizures, or pull a wheelchair.

Emotional support animals may be dogs—but may also be almost any other species. They are medically prescribed by a doctor and provide support for a single disabled person. Emotional support animals are not highly trained, but they do provide significant support and comfort.

Therapy animals are pets that have been trained, registered, and insured. They do not belong to the person with a disability, but to someone who brings the animal to facilities for therapeutic purposes, or has a facility with therapy animals, such as therapeutic horseback riding.

It is costly to provide the training and support necessary for service, support, and therapy animals and for the children that need them – many of whom have developmental disabilities. As such, the Council recommends the following amendments to ensure all children who need service, support, and therapy animals are eligible:

- page 2, lines 7-8: (B) “ELIGIBLE CHILD” MEANS A CHILD WHO HAS A HISTORY OF TRAUMA, ~~OR HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER,~~ **OR HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH THE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY AND SPECIAL HEALTHCARE NEED AS DEFINED UNDER TITLE V OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT.**
- Page 4, lines 9-22: §13-4104: (A) A NONPROFIT TRAINING ENTITY MAY DISQUALIFY A PROGRAM PARTICIPANT FROM PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM IF THE NONPROFIT TRAINING ENTITY DETERMINES THAT THE PROGRAM PARTICIPANT’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROGRAM: (1) PRESENTS A DANGER TO THE PROGRAM PARTICIPANT’S MENTAL OR PHYSICAL WELL-BEING; **(2) HAS CAUSED OR MAY POTENTIALLY CAUSE HARM IS A DIRECT THREAT TO OTHERS AS DEFINED BY THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT, AN ANIMAL, OR PROPERTY;** (3) PRESENTS A ~~DANGER~~ **DIRECT THREAT** TO THE MENTAL OR PHYSICAL WELL-BEING OF THE SERVICE DOG, SUPPORT DOG, OR THERAPY HORSE; OR....

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