



MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COALITION

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

House Health and Government Operations Committee

February 26, 2020

HB 547: 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 HB 547 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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