



**Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families
Office of the Secretary**

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GOVERNOR**

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LT. GOVERNOR**

**ANTHONY C. WOODS
SECRETARY**

**Senate Bill 182 - Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program - Eligibility -
Family Members of Veterans
SUPPORT**

March 14, 2025

The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and Committee Members,

The Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF) is committed to leading veterans and their families through life's transitions, making Maryland the best state for the military-connected communities. DVMF fulfills its mission through five core programs: the Service and Benefits Program, which helps veterans access federal, state, and local earned benefits; Charlotte Hall Veterans Home, offering assisted living and skilled nursing care; the Cemetery and Memorial Program, providing dignified resting places and maintaining memorials honoring Maryland's veterans; the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program, fostering connection and awareness; and the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund, offering financial assistance to veterans and their families in need. These programs reflect Maryland's commitment to honoring and empowering its military-connected community.

The Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families supports Senate Bill 182 - Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program-Eligibility-Family Members of Veterans.

This legislation represents a critical step forward in recognizing the needs of military-connected families, ensuring they have access to life-changing service animals that can provide vital support in navigating the challenges associated with military and veteran life. Expanding eligibility to include spouses and dependents acknowledges the reality that military service impacts not just the veteran but the entire family. Many military spouses and children experience secondary effects of service-related injuries, including PTSD, anxiety, and mobility limitations, making access to service animals a meaningful addition to their care and well-being.

By broadening the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program, this bill will:

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1. **Enhance Family Well-Being:** Many military families bear the emotional and physical burdens of service-connected disabilities. Providing service animals to spouses and dependents offers them additional support in managing daily life, reducing stress, and fostering a healthier family environment.
2. **Support Caregivers:** Spouses of veterans often serve as primary caregivers, facing emotional and physical strain. Service animals can alleviate some of this burden by assisting in daily tasks and providing emotional comfort.
3. **Improve Mental Health Outcomes:** Research shows that service animals contribute to reduced anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms. Extending this benefit to military-connected family members ensures a more holistic approach to mental health and resilience.
4. **Reduce Barriers to Support:** By allowing family members to access service animals, Maryland strengthens its commitment to ensuring military and veteran families have the tools and resources they need to thrive.

Thank you for your attention to this important proposal and I ask the committee for a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Woods". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and 'W'.

Anthony C. Woods
Secretary