

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

Senate Bill 124

(Senator Simonaire)

Judicial Proceedings

Judiciary

Anne Arundel County and Harford County - Court Dog and Child Witness Pilot Program - Extension

This bill extends, from September 30, 2019, to September 30, 2021, the termination date of the Courthouse Dog and Child Witness Pilot Program in the circuit courts for Anne Arundel and Harford counties. It also changes the name to the Court Dog and Child Witness Pilot Program and extends to September 30, 2021, the date by which a required report must be submitted. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2019.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not materially impact the workload or finances of the Judiciary.

Local Effect: The bill does not materially impact the workload or finances of the circuit courts.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: Chapter 467 of 2016 established the Courthouse Dog and Child Witness Pilot Program in the circuit courts for Anne Arundel and Harford counties. The purpose of the 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. Pursuant to Chapter 467, a child witness was limited to witnesses who were minors when testifying in *criminal* proceedings. Chapter 196 of 2017 expanded the pilot program to include civil proceedings.

To accomplish the purpose of the pilot program, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is responsible for (1) developing a plan to implement the pilot program; (2) establishing 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 (3) ensuring that the details of the pilot program are publicly available. The pilot program is fully operational in both counties.

A “facility dog” is a dog that has (1) graduated from a program of an assistance dog organization that trains dogs for the purpose of reducing stress in a child witness; (2) received two years of training; (3) passed the same public access test as a service dog; and (4) been teamed with a facility dog handler. A “therapy dog” is a dog that has (1) received training to provide affection and comfort to children who need emotional support and (2) been teamed with a therapy dog handler.

Facility dog handlers and therapy dog handlers must meet specified training requirements, including training from qualified organizations on offering the handler’s animal for assistance and training on court protocol and policies.

By September 30, 2019, AOC must report to the Governor and the General Assembly on the operation and results of the pilot program. AOC may adopt rules to implement the Act’s provisions. The pilot program terminates September 30, 2019.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Anne Arundel and Harford counties; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 25, 2019
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