

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 105

(Senator Simonaire, *et al.*)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Health and Government Operations

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Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program - Therapy Horses

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This bill expands the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program to include nonprofit training entities that use trained therapy horses for interaction with veterans. The expansion allows such organizations to receive funding from the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program Fund. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2019.**

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** None. The bill primarily alters the purposes for which existing funds may be used.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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Analysis

**Current Law:** 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. Chapter 152 of 2018 requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs or the Secretary's designee to administer the fund. 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.

By October 1, 2018, and annually thereafter, MDVA must post and maintain on its website a list of individuals who have donated to the fund in the previous year and have not requested to remain anonymous.

**Background:** Equine therapy involves horse-based activities to assist the cognitive, physical, emotional, and social well-being of those being treated. Generally, participants are guided by a trained therapy rider who facilitates activities between the participant and their horse. Typical therapies can include hippotherapy (horseback riding as a means of improving coordination, balance, and strength); therapeutic driving (driving a carriage pulled by horse or pony); and equine-assisted activities (grooming and stable management, in addition to riding activities). The duration of therapy sessions, for either individuals or groups, ranges from 30 to 50 minutes. Costs per therapy session range from \$115 to \$300.

For fiscal 2018, MDVA received \$150,000 in general funds for the program. MDVA advises that, as of January 22, 2019, the program had received \$11,276 in donations and authorized \$10,000 in disbursements.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Veterans Affairs; Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International; National Center for Equine Facilitated Therapy; Maryland Therapeutic Riding; Horses Adaptive Riding and Therapy; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 25, 2019  
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