

Chapter 161

(House Bill 311)

AN ACT concerning

Courts – Court Dog and Child Witness Program – Established

FOR the purpose of establishing the Court Dog and Child Witness Program; providing that the Program shall be in the circuit court of each county that participates in the Program; providing that participation in the Program is voluntary; requiring a participating court to adhere to certain procedures ~~and rules~~ adopted by the Administrative Office of the Courts; establishing the purpose of the Program; requiring the Administrative Office of the Courts to develop a plan to implement the Program; requiring the Administrative Office of the Courts to establish requirements that a party in a certain proceeding must follow; requiring the Administrative Office of the Courts to make information about the Program publicly available; requiring the Administrative Office of the Courts to adopt certain ~~rules~~ procedures; defining certain terms; altering the termination date of the Court Dog and Child Witness Pilot Program; and generally relating to the Court Dog and Child Witness Program.

BY adding to

Article – Courts and Judicial Proceedings

Section 9–501 to be under the new subtitle “Subtitle 5. Court Dog and Child Witness Program”

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2013 Replacement Volume and 2019 Supplement)

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,

Chapter 467 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2016, as amended by Chapter 196 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2017 and Chapter 466 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2019

Section 2

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Courts and Judicial Proceedings

SUBTITLE 5. COURT DOG AND CHILD WITNESS PROGRAM.

9–501.

(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.

(2) “CHILD WITNESS” MEANS A WITNESS WHO IS A MINOR WHEN THE WITNESS TESTIFIES IN A COURT PROCEEDING.

(3) “FACILITY DOG” MEANS A DOG THAT HAS:

(I) GRADUATED FROM A PROGRAM OF AN ASSISTANCE DOG ORGANIZATION THAT ~~TRAINS DOGS FOR THE PURPOSE OF REDUCING STRESS IN A CHILD WITNESS OR CHILD VICTIM;~~

~~(II) RECEIVED 2 YEARS OF TRAINING;~~

~~(III) PASSED THE SAME A PUBLIC ACCESS TEST AS A FOR SERVICE DOG DOGS; AND~~

~~(IV) IS A MEMBER OF A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED ASSISTANCE DOG ASSOCIATION; AND~~

(II) BEEN TEAMED WITH A FACILITY DOG HANDLER.

(4) “FACILITY DOG HANDLER” MEANS A PERSON WHO HAS RECEIVED TRAINING ON:

(I) OFFERING THE PERSON’S ANIMAL FOR ASSISTANCE PURPOSES FROM AN ORGANIZATION ACCREDITED BY ASSISTANCE DOGS INTERNATIONAL OR AN EQUIVALENT ORGANIZATION; AND

(II) COURT PROTOCOL AND POLICIES, INCLUDING THE EXPECTED ROLE OF AN ANIMAL ASSISTANCE TEAM AND HOW NOT TO INTERFERE WITH EVIDENCE COLLECTION OR THE EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.

(5) “PROGRAM” MEANS THE COURT DOG AND CHILD WITNESS PROGRAM.

(6) “THERAPY DOG” MEANS A DOG THAT HAS:

(I) RECEIVED TRAINING TO PROVIDE AFFECTION AND COMFORT TO ~~CHILDREN~~ INDIVIDUALS WHO NEED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT; ~~AND~~

(II) BEEN TEAMED WITH A THERAPY DOG HANDLER; AND

(III) 1. GRADUATED FROM A PROGRAM OPERATED BY AN ORGANIZATION THAT REGISTERS OR CERTIFIES ASSISTANCE THERAPY DOGS AND THEIR HANDLERS TO MEET OR EXCEED THE STANDARDS OF PRACTICE IN ANIMAL-ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS; OR

~~2. A. PASSED A PUBLIC ACCESS TEST FOR SERVICE DOGS; AND~~

~~B. BEEN SPECIALLY TRAINED TO PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT TO WITNESSES TESTIFYING IN JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS WITHOUT CAUSING A DISTRACTION.~~

(7) "THERAPY DOG HANDLER" MEANS A PERSON WHO HAS RECEIVED TRAINING ON:

(I) OFFERING THE PERSON'S ANIMAL FOR ASSISTANCE PURPOSES FROM AN ORGANIZATION THAT INSURES, REGISTERS, OR CERTIFIES ~~THERAPY ASSISTANCE~~ THERAPY DOGS AND THEIR HANDLERS; AND

(II) COURT PROTOCOL AND POLICIES, INCLUDING THE EXPECTED ROLE OF AN ANIMAL ASSISTANCE TEAM AND HOW NOT TO INTERFERE WITH EVIDENCE COLLECTION OR THE EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.

(B) (1) THERE IS A COURT DOG AND CHILD WITNESS PROGRAM.

(2) THE PROGRAM SHALL BE IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF EACH COUNTY THAT PARTICIPATES IN THE PROGRAM.

(3) PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM SHALL BE VOLUNTARY.

(4) A PARTICIPATING COURT SHALL ADHERE TO THE PROCEDURES ~~ESTABLISHED AND RULES~~ ADOPTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS SECTION BY THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS.

(C) THE PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM IS TO PROVIDE A FACILITY DOG OR THERAPY DOG TO A CHILD WITNESS IN ANY CIRCUIT COURT PROCEEDING OR OTHER RELATED COURT PROCESS, MEETING, OR INTERVIEW IN THE STATE, INCLUDING:

(1) AN IN CAMERA REVIEW OR OTHER INTERACTION WITH A JUDGE OR A MAGISTRATE;

(2) A MEETING WITH AN ATTORNEY, BEST INTEREST ATTORNEY, PRIVILEGE ATTORNEY, OR OTHER SPECIALIZED ATTORNEY; OR

(3) A MEETING WITH A CUSTODY EVALUATOR.

(D) TO ACCOMPLISH THE PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM, THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS SHALL:

(1) DEVELOP A PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM;

(2) ESTABLISH 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) ENSURE THAT THE DETAILS OF THE PROGRAM ARE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE.

(E) THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS MAY ADOPT ~~RULES~~ PROCEDURES TO IMPLEMENT THIS SECTION.

**Chapter 467 of the Acts of 2016, as amended by Chapter 196 of the Acts of 2017
and Chapter 466 of the Acts of 2019**

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2016. It shall remain effective for a period of **[5] 4** years and, at the end of September 30, **[2021] 2020**, with no further action required by the General Assembly, this Act shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2020.

Enacted under Article II, § 17(c) of the Maryland Constitution, May 8, 2020.