

Chapter 268

(Senate Bill 182)

AN ACT concerning

Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program – Eligibility – Family Members of Veterans

FOR the purpose of expanding eligibility for the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program to include a spouse or dependent of an eligible veteran; and generally relating to the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
Article – State Government
Section 9–957
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

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

Article – State Government

9–957.

(a) (1) In this section the following words have the meanings indicated.

(2) **“ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBER” MEANS A SPOUSE OR DEPENDENT OF AN ELIGIBLE VETERAN.**

(3) “Eligible veteran” means an individual who:

(i) served on active duty in:

1. the armed forces of the United States;
2. the National Guard; or
3. a reserve component of the armed forces of the United

States;

(ii) served in a capacity other than for training;

(iii) was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable; and

(iv) 1. is a resident of the State; or

2. receives treatment or care from a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or U.S. Department of Defense medical facility in the State.

[(3)] (4) “Fund” means the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program Fund established under subsection (f) of this section.

[(4)] (5) “Nonprofit training entity” means a corporation, a foundation, or any other legal entity that:

(i) is qualified under § 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code;

(ii) 1. engages in the training of service dogs or support dogs for use by veterans; or

2. uses trained therapy horses for interaction with veterans;
and

(iii) has been selected by the Department to provide services under this section.

[(5)] (6) “Program” means the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program established under subsection (b) of this section.

[(6)] (7) “Program participant” means an eligible veteran **OR ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBER** who participates in the Program.

[(7)] (8) “Service dog” means a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.

[(8)] (9) “Successful Program participant” means a Program participant who successfully completes the training or therapy protocol specified by a nonprofit training entity.

[(9)] (10) “Support dog” means a dog that is individually trained and that serves as an emotional support or therapy animal that a medical professional, within the medical professional’s scope of practice, has determined provides benefit for an individual with a sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.

[(10)] (11) “Therapy horse” includes a horse determined appropriate for interactions with veterans by a stable licensed by the State that:

(i) is a Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship, International (PATH, Intl.) member center; or

(ii) has Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) certified professionals who provide services to veterans.

(b) There is a Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program in the Department.

(c) The purposes of the Program are to:

(1) refer eligible veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** who inquire about participation in the Program to one or more nonprofit training entities;

(2) provide additional funding mechanisms to assist veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** participating in the Program;

(3) encourage successful Program participants to assist in outreach and referral of other eligible veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** who could benefit from participation in the Program;

(4) assist in the reduction of the Maryland veteran suicide rate; and

(5) identify potential capital projects and services to facilitate more services for veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** in the State.

(d) (1) The Department shall select at least one nonprofit training entity to:

(i) implement a training or therapy protocol for the purposes of the Program that will teach each Program participant methodologies, strategies, and techniques for:

1. partnering with service dogs or support dogs; or

2. interacting with therapy horses;

(ii) select qualified Program participants from those eligible veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** referred to the nonprofit entity under the Program;

(iii) select an appropriate service dog, support dog, or therapy horse, as applicable, for each Program participant;

(iv) facilitate each Program participant's training or therapy using the nonprofit training entity's training or therapy protocol; and

(v) unless the nonprofit training entity uses trained therapy horses, partner each successful Program participant with the service dog or support dog on the Program participant's successful completion of the nonprofit training entity's training protocol.

(2) To be eligible for selection under paragraph (1) of this subsection, a nonprofit entity must:

(i) be based in the State;

(ii) serve the needs of the veteran population in the State; and

(iii) generate its own revenue and reinvest the proceeds of that revenue in the growth and development of its programs.

(e) (1) 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:

(i) presents a danger to the Program participant's mental or physical well-being;

(ii) has caused or may potentially cause harm to others, an animal, or property;

(iii) presents a danger to the service dog's, support dog's, or therapy horse's mental or physical well-being; or

(iv) does not meet the training requirement of the nonprofit.

(2) A Program participant may discontinue involvement in the Program for any reason.

(f) (1) There is a Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program Fund.

(2) The Department shall use revenue from the Fund to pay a nonprofit training entity.

(3) Revenue from the Fund may be used only to pay:

(i) a nonprofit training entity; and

(ii) administrative costs of the Program.

(4) The Secretary, or the Secretary's designee, shall administer the Fund.

(5) (i) The Fund is a special, nonlapsing fund that is not subject to § 7-302 of the State Finance and Procurement Article.

(ii) The State Treasurer shall hold the Fund separately, and the Comptroller shall account for the Fund.

(6) The Fund consists of:

(i) revenue collected by the Department in the form of donations to the Program;

(ii) money appropriated in the State budget to the Fund; and

(iii) any other money from any other source accepted for the benefit of the Fund.

(7) The State Treasurer shall invest the money of the Fund in the same manner as other State money may be invested.

(8) Any interest earnings of the Fund shall be credited to the General Fund of the State.

(9) Expenditures from the Fund may be made only in accordance with the State budget.

(10) Money expended from the Fund is supplemental to and is not intended to take the place of funding that otherwise would be appropriated for the Program.

(g) (1) For the purpose of implementing this section, the Department may accept gifts or grants for donation to the Fund.

(2) On or before October 1, 2018, and each October 1 thereafter, the Department shall post and maintain on its website a list containing the names of all persons who have donated to the Fund in the previous year and have authorized the Department to publish their names on its website.

(h) The Department shall adopt regulations to implement this section, including regulations establishing procedures for the Department to:

(1) promote the Program to eligible veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** through the Department's outreach methods;

(2) refer eligible veterans **AND ELIGIBLE FAMILY MEMBERS** to selected nonprofit entities;

(3) receive donations for the Fund through a link placed in a prominent location on the Department's website; and

(4) use revenue from the Fund to pay selected nonprofit entities for services that are provided through the Program.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2025.

Approved by the Governor, May 6, 2025.