

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 182 (Senator Simonaire)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

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

This bill expands eligibility for the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program to include an “eligible family member” (a spouse or dependent of an eligible veteran) and makes conforming changes.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill primarily alters the purposes for which existing discretionary program funds may be used. The Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF) can handle any administrative changes with existing resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Chapter 416 of 2017 established the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program and Fund. 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. DVMF must select at least one nonprofit training entity that meets specified qualifications to carry out elements of the program. Chapter 465 of 2019 expanded the program to include nonprofit training entities that use trained therapy horses for interaction with veterans.

The fund consists of donations collected by DVMF, money appropriated to the fund in the State budget, and any other money accepted for the benefit of 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.

In fiscal 2025, MDVF issued nine \$21,500 grants to nonprofit training entities in eight different jurisdictions to provide either equine-assisted therapy or trained service dogs to Maryland veterans. The Governor's fiscal 2026 budget as introduced includes \$211,930 in general funds for the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Veterans and Military Families; Department of Legislative Services

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km/jc

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