



**Warrior
Canine
Connection**

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To whom it may concern,

We are writing in support of the Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members & Veterans (SB0904/HB1515) that calls for the creation of a state fund to provide matching grants to community-based organizations providing evidence-based behavioral health treatments for service members (including the Guard and Reserves), veterans, and their family members. There is great need for behavioral health services among veterans, service members and their families in Maryland. There are approximately 399,000 veterans living in Maryland, of which an estimated 24,000 have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Across the state, approximately 10,000 veterans are dealing with post-traumatic stress or major depression. We know that veterans comprise 18% of all deaths by suicide in Maryland and this group is twice as likely as non-veterans to die by suicide. Community-based organizations play a crucial role in providing timely, evidence-based services that fill the existing gaps in the VA system.

Warrior Canine Connection (WCC) is a Maryland based non-profit organization that serves Veterans from all eras whom have sustained physical and/or psychological injuries in defense of our country. WCC offers a unique integrated medicine modality where Veterans with invisible wounds learn to train service dogs for their fellow Veterans. The training process provides a healing mission for the Veteran trainers while providing well-trained service dogs for their battle buddies. This matching grant program would help us serve a great many more Veterans and their families.

Having a strong network of community-based organizations that understand military culture and in particular, the core value of the Warrior Ethos, is critical. The Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program is a step towards solving the problem. We encourage its passage.

Sincerely,

Rick Yount
Founder/Executive Director
Warrior Canine Connection