



February 13, 2020

SB 412 - Public Safety - Law Enforcement - Veterinary Care of Retired Law Enforcement K-9s Act - SUPPORT

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

The Maryland Veterinary Medical Association (MDVMA) was established in 1886 and is the largest professional and advocacy organization for veterinarians and technicians in Maryland. MDVMA's mission is to serve as a leading resource for the veterinary community through communication, education, representation and support for the advancement of animal and public health in Maryland. Our members are licensed practitioners in the fields of small animal, equine and food animal health.

MDVMA strongly supports the creation of a Compassion Care Fund to offset veterinary costs for retired service canines.

Please see the testimony below from Dr. Jim Peterson, DVM about his experience caring for Maryland K-9s.

"I have had the honor and privilege to hold the contract for discounted veterinary services for the Prince George's County Police Canines for the past 15+ years. This includes the Department of Corrections, the Sheriff's Department and the Fire/EMS service canines also. We also offer non-contracted discounted veterinary services for the Cities of Bowie, Hyattsville, Takoma Park and Seat Pleasant police canines. Most importantly, we offer discounted veterinary services to these working dogs once they are retired and adopted by their handlers. Here are a few reasons why I believe that the creation of a Compassion Care Fund for retired service canines is the right thing to do.

Working K-9's put their lives on the line every day to serve and protect. These dogs provide protection, extraction, search & rescue, and detection (bombs, weapons, drugs) services in their line of duty. While working, they receive the very best medical care available through government funding.

The relationship between handler and canine is like no other. They protect each other, literally, with their lives. It makes the most sense for retired canines to go home with their handlers to become household pets after retiring from active service. The handlers should be commended for their dedication to their working canine partner. Many of these working dogs live with their handler during their working career already; it makes sense for the canines to stay with their handlers in retirement.

The average working career of a service canine is 6-9 years. Their intense training and workload usually result in forced retirement due to injury. Their lifespan is longer. It is important to provide medical care for the canines after their retirement. Unfortunately, the canines do not receive a pension.

Injuries in the line of duty, causing them to be removed from service, often require increased veterinary care and subsequent cost. The handlers often are faced with the difficult decision to be able to provide continued medical care versus euthanasia due to cost. These service canines and their handlers deserve better after dedicating their lives to serving the public.

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I am honored to be able to care for the police canines and other service canines in our community. The integrity of these programs and the dedication of the handlers is unmatched. The canines, themselves, are amazing creatures. The creation of a Compassion Care Fund to offset veterinary expenses for retired canines by private donations with an annual and lifetime cap is a concept that is, in hindsight, long overdue.”

Establishing a fund to support retired law enforcement dogs makes sense. Often times, they are adopted by their professional partners and work until they are nearly forced to retire. Providing for comfortable end of life and regular veterinary care for our K-9 state and local law enforcement employees is a great idea. As an association, we applaud Sen. Kramer for introducing this legislation and offer our strong support in favor of SB 412.

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