

MMC_SB 184_SIMONAIRE_2021_EHE.pdf

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MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT
SENATE BILL 284
BEFORE THE
SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 2, 2021

Chairman Pinsky, Madam Vice Chair Kagan and distinguished members of the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs,

The Maryland Military Coalition, comprised of 16 active duty and veteran service organizations who represent nearly 150,000 members throughout our State strongly support Senate Bill 284, the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program – Definitions as a means to potentially reduce the number of suicides in the veteran community as well as bring needed aid and comfort to those suffering from service induced medical and psychological disorders and permanent injuries.

As the measure states this will bring much needed financial aid to those nonprofit entities who serve our veterans through designed therapeutic programs supported by the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Fund administered by the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs.

These benefits alone make SB 284 a viable, necessary program, in our estimation, and a worthwhile expenditure of State resources.

In closing, the Maryland Military Coalition salutes Senator Simonaire for his continual, consistent for the Maryland veteran community and we deeply urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 284.

Yours, respectfully

Patrick Guibao

Patrick J. Guibao
Vice President and
Legislative Director
Maryland Military Coalition

Copies to Senator Simonaire
 MMC Officers

SB 284 Sen. Bryan Simonaire_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Leber, Verna

Position: FAV

BRYAN W. SIMONAIRE
Legislative District 31
Anne Arundel County

MINORITY LEADER

Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Subcommittees

Chair, Alcohol

Health

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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Written Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 284

Chairman and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, I am here to introduce and voice my support for Senate Bill 284 – *Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program – Definitions*.

Senate Bill 284 would define various terms for the purposes of the provisions of law regarding this Program.

SB0284-693223-01.pdf

Uploaded by: Leber, Verna

Position: FAV



SB0284/693223/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

21 JAN 21
08:45:05

BY: Senator Simonaire

(To be offered in the Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee)

AMENDMENT TO SENATE BILL 284

(First Reading File Bill)

On page 3, strike beginning with “SERVES” on line 1 down through “ANIMAL” in line 2 and substitute “IS INDIVIDUALLY TRAINED TO DO WORK OR PERFORM TASKS FOR THE BENEFIT OF AN INDIVIDUAL”.

testimony - therapy horse definition SB284.pages.p

Uploaded by: Seigler, Jane

Position: FWA

**SB 284 - Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program - Definitions
Maryland Horse Council, FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

Hearing before the Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee,
February 2, 2021

The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based, umbrella trade association of the entire horse industry in Maryland. Our membership includes horse farms and stables (including those that provide equine assisted therapy and services to veterans), horse-related businesses, and horse owners, representing all facets of the Maryland equestrian community, from the owners of race horses to the owners of trail horses or just beloved retired companion horses. As such, we represent over 30,000 Marylanders.



MHC supports the laudable goal of ensuring the safety and welfare of veterans enrolled in equine assisted learning and therapy programs, and of the horses who serve them, as well as the goal of making these proven beneficial services available to the greatest number of veterans. However, we believe that the definition of “therapy horse” as included in SB 284 is too restrictive, and therefore does not advance those goals.

SB 284 provides:

“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.) PREMIER ACCREDITED MEMBER CENTER; OR

(II) HAS EQUINE ASSISTED GROWTH AND LEARNING ASSOCIATION (EAGALA) CERTIFIED PROFESSIONALS WHO PROVIDE SERVICES TO VETERANS.

MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL
PO BOX 606
LISBON, MD 21765

The bill, in essence, requires that each local, nonprofit, equine therapy program and/or its own instructors and trainers go through the process of becoming officially certified by PATH or EAGALA. We understand that such processes can be lengthy and very expensive - potentially beyond the reach of many local programs that have operated for years with great track records of safety and success.

We note that the definitions of service and support dogs in the bill do not require such certifications by third party organizations.

MHC has consulted a group of Maryland providers of equine services to veterans about the proposed definition. The group generally felt that the definition in the bill is too narrow, and would exclude a number of well-established programs in the state. For example, as we have been advised, there are only 8 PATH Premiere Accredited Member Centers in Maryland. Apparently, only 3 of those provide programs for veterans. Therefore, we believe that the alternative definition, below, will better ensure that these important services are available to the greatest number of veterans, as close to their homes as possible, while at the same time ensuring that only the highest quality programs are delivered.

We suggest this wording:

“THERAPY HORSE” INCLUDES A HORSE DETERMINED APPROPRIATE FOR INTERACTIONS WITH VETERANS BY A HORSE DISCOVERY CENTER CERTIFIED BY THE STATE THAT:

(I) 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; OR

(II) 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.

We suggest changing "licensed stable" to MD Department of Agriculture certified "Horse Discovery Center" because the requirements for an HDC are more stringent. For example, an HDC center has to have liability insurance, written safety rules, handicap accessible areas, helmet requirements, etc. (the guidelines can be found here: <https://mda.maryland.gov/horseboard/pdf/Guidelines%20-%20Criteria%20for%20Certification.pdf>).

The other definitional language mirrors the language used for "service dog" and "support dog" already in the bill. This definition ensures that the horses are acceptable according to professionally recognized standards, without imposing undue financial burden on some of the smaller but still very worthy nonprofits providing equine therapy to veterans.

We urge the Committee to amend the bill according to our suggestions, and report it favorably.

Respectfully submitted,

The Maryland Horse Council



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