



Maryland State's Attorneys' Association

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DATE: **January 26, 2021**

BILL NUMBER: **SB 7**

POSITION: **Support**

The Maryland State's Attorney Association (MSAA) supports SB 7.

SB 7 expands the Court Dog and Child Witness Program, established in the last legislative session, to include the use of facility or therapy dogs in Veterans Treatment Courts. The Administrative Office of the Courts is tasked with providing rules, procedures and a plan of implementation.

For many years, Courts and Child Advocacy Centers have been utilizing dogs in therapeutic and support based roles in cases involving child victims. These dogs have been highly trained and deployed countless times to comfort traumatized children and their families during the forensic interview process and trial preparation. Their presence has a powerful effect on vulnerable victims and have led to a greater ability to elicit forensic disclosures and impactful testimony.

This same impact would be helpful for veterans who similarly are experiencing trauma as a result of their service. The calming and therapeutic effect of this program would undoubtedly allow a veteran participating in the program to better focus and contribute to a successful graduation from the program. Clearly these animals are an invaluable resource, and should be applied liberally to all groups where trauma and support are required.

This legislation will undoubtedly facilitate the ability to reduce the traumatizing effects felt by veterans who may be triggered by the stress involved in the Veterans Treatment Court Process. The presence of properly trained facility or therapy dogs in treatment courts generally and in courthouse settings should be maximized.

For these reasons the MSAA requests a favorable report on SB 7.