

SB0007 MHAMD FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Allen, Emily

Position: FAV

Senate Bill 7 Courts – Court Dog Therapy Program – Veterans Treatment Courts

Judicial Proceedings Committee

January 26, 2021

Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 7.

SB 7 expands the Court Dog and Child Witness Program to provide therapy dogs for individuals in Veterans Treatment Court.

Across a variety of studies, dogs have shown to help lower blood pressure in response to stress tests/tasks, reduce anxiety in children, and can be trained to assist owners diagnosed with PTSD, schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder.¹ By providing therapy dogs, veterans can feel more comfortable during proceedings.

Expanding the Court Dog and Child Witness Program will provide further resources to veterans who have suffered significant trauma and experience worsened anxiety in the courtroom. Veterans Treatment Courts throughout the United States have begun similar programs, including Baltimore City, MD. The Honorable Judge Halee Weinstein of Baltimore City has partnered the Veterans Treatment Court with the Warrior Canine Connection, which allows veterans to have a dog with them in the courtroom during each docket as comfort, and allows them to train therapy and service dogs to eventually be matched with another veteran.²

Veterans Treatment Courts have been used to help more than 10,000 veterans diagnosed with mental health and substance use disorders facing legal concerns, and this number is only growing.³ The opportunity to provide comfort in the courtroom to a population that has faced significant trauma in serving their country cannot be passed by. For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 7 and urges a favorable report.

¹Ehrenfeld, T. (2019, October 7). Your dog can help your anxiety. *Psychology Today*.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/open-gently/201910/your-dog-can-help-your-anxiety>

²Maryland Courts. (2018, November 13). *Baltimore City Veterans Treatment Court celebrates graduates, three-year anniversary*. [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.mdcourts.gov/media/news/2018/pr20181113>

³Warrior Canine Connection. (n.d.). *Warrior Canine Connection launches program in Baltimore City Veterans Treatment Court*. [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://warriorcanineconnection.org/press-releases/warrior-canine-connection-launches-program-in-baltimore-city-veterans-treatment-court/>

For more information, please contact Emily Allen at (443) 901-1588

MD Judiciary - Testimony SB 7.pdf

Uploaded by: Elalamy, Sara

Position: FAV

MARYLAND JUDICIAL CONFERENCE
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Hon. Mary Ellen Barbera
Chief Judge

187 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Legislative Committee
Suzanne D. Pelz, Esq.
410-260-1523
RE: Senate Bill 7
Courts – Court Dog Therapy Program – Veterans Treatment
Courts
DATE: January 13, 2021
(1/26)
POSITION: Support

The Maryland Judiciary supports Senate Bill 7. Senate Bill 7 expands the purposes of the Court Dog Therapy Program to state that purposes of the Program also include providing a facility dog or therapy dog to a veteran participating in a veterans treatment court proceeding or other related court process or meeting in a Circuit Court or District Court that offers a veterans treatment court program. Such meetings include a status review with a judge or magistrate, a meeting with an attorney, or a meeting with a probation, pretrial, or court case manager.

These bills rename the Court Dog and Child Witness Program as the Court Dog Therapy Program. The bills will allow the program to be in either a participating Circuit Court or in a participating location of the District Court, if that District Court location offers a veterans' treatment court program. The original pilot has been successful in Anne Arundel and Harford Counties regarding child witnesses and victims so expansion to veterans' programs where workable is worthwhile.

cc. Hon. Bryan Simonaire
Judicial Council
Legislative Committee
Kelley O'Connor

SB7 Support 01222021.pdf

Uploaded by: Kreinberg, Josh

Position: FAV



Judicial Proceedings Committee

SB 7

Position: Support

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

We commend Senator Simonaire for introducing Senate Bill 7. This bill would make a life-changing impact on the lives of service men and women in Maryland by including veterans in the Court Dog Therapy Program.

PuppySpot (<https://www.puppyspot.com>) is a community of dog lovers and a trusted service helping customers find healthy puppies from our vetted and screened network of responsible breeders across the country. Our PuppySpot Gives Back Program continues our mission to celebrate dogs always and make a difference by integrating philanthropy into our corporate philosophy and actions. Through this program, we have positively impacted the lives of Wounded Warrior veterans through puppy donations. Additionally, our partners at American Humane provide service dog training for veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress (PTS) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) through their Pups4Patriots program and have seen the powerful benefits of the human-animal bond.

Therapy dogs can do wonderful things for veterans. Research evaluating the impact of service dog therapies with military veterans¹ demonstrates help with PTSD; reduced anxiety, panic attacks, and depression; and reduced medication, improved sleep, and the ability to return to work. Ultimately, the inclusion of veterans in the Court Dog Therapy Program would greatly benefit local Maryland veterans struggling with PTSD and TBI; as such, we support Senate Bill 7.

¹O'Haire, M. E., & Rodriguez, K. E. (2018). Preliminary efficacy of service dogs as a complementary treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder in military members and veterans. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1(6), e1-8.

SB 7 - Senator Bryan Simonaire Testimony.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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The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Written Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 7

Chairman and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, I am here to introduce and voice my support for Senate Bill 7 – Courts – Court Dog Therapy Program – Veterans Treatment Courts.

Senate Bill 7 would expand the Court Dog and Child Witness Program to veterans participating in veterans treatment court.

SB 7 - FAV - LOS.pdf

Uploaded by: Patashnick, Gavin

Position: FAV



Maryland State's Attorneys' Association

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410-203-9881

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Brian DeLeonardo
President

Steven I. Kroll
Coordinator

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.

SB7_Simonaire_SmithBT.pdf

Uploaded by: Smith, Brian

Position: FAV

SENATE BILL 7 – SUPPORT

**Senate Bill 7 – Court Dog Therapy Program – Veterans Treatment Courts
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 26, 2021**

My name is Brian Smith. I am a post-9/11 combat Veteran, and I am here today to offer my **support Senate Bill 7.**

Appearing before a judge in a criminal case can be a traumatic experience for anyone, but the process can be even more difficult for veterans, many of whom suffer from PTSD.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimates that one in six Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are alcohol and/or drug addicted and one in five suffers from PTSD or significant mental anguish...that represents 450,000-540,000 Veterans.

There are **over 700,000 Veterans of all service periods** currently caught up in the criminal justice system. Tragically, that number is growing at an alarming rate as veterans are being arrested for charges directly related to trauma, substance abuse, and/or mental illness.

We have seen the impact that Veterans Treatment Courts have in helping veterans caught up in the criminal justice system – standing between the veteran and a felony conviction, incarceration, or worse; ensuring that when returning service members are arrested because of a substance abuse and/ or mental health disorder, they receive the structure, treatment and mentoring they need to get their lives back on track.

How can we improve the Veterans Treatment Courts outcomes for our justice-involved Veterans? Add a dog! A therapy dog or a facility dog!

Senate Bill 7 expands the application of the current court dog program to offer therapy or facility dog support to Veterans appearing in participating county Veterans Treatment Courts.

While not considered service dogs, therapy dogs and facility dogs receive training but have a completely different type of job from service dogs. Their responsibilities are to provide psychological or physiological support to individuals other than their handlers. These dogs have stable temperaments and friendly, easy-going personalities.

These professionally trained dogs are suitable for providing quiet companionship to vulnerable individuals in legal settings without causing any disruption of the proceedings. These working dogs are specially chosen because of their calm demeanor and ability to work in a high-stress environment thereby decreasing the risk of creating legal issues.

Our Veterans were there when our country called, we should similarly be there for them in their times of need.

Give a Veteran a Second Chance and Give a Dog a Job!

I respectfully request a favorable report for Senate Bill 7.

SB7 Court Dog SWA Center for Hope.pdf

Uploaded by: Lombardi, Joyce

Position: FWA

Senate Bill 7 - Court Dog Therapy Program- Veterans Treatment Courts
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee – January 26, 2021
Testimony of Joyce Lombardi, Director of Government Relations
Position: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

Center for Hope (CFH) writes in support of SB7, which would expand the recently enacted court dog law to allow veterans to be accompanied in certain court proceedings by a specifically trained dog. Passed in 2019, the court dog program guided Maryland courts on standards for “facility” and “therapy” dogs and handlers who are used in court proceedings with child witnesses. Both are terms of art and have different standards of training, use and certification. The two terms are not interchangeable. Thus CFH supports the sponsor’s amendments on this bill, which seek simply to remove the misleading word “Therapy” from the suggested new title of the court dog program, i.e., “Court Dog ~~Therapy~~ Program”, as used on page 1, line 20 and page 2, line 19. All other uses of “therapy dog” throughout the current law would stay intact, as indicated in SB7.

Center for Hope, a subsidiary of LifeBridge Health, helps clients and patients heal from acute violence such as child abuse, domestic violence, street violence and elder abuse through integrated, evidence-based programs that extend beyond hospital walls. We provide trauma-informed crisis intervention, forensic interviews, medical exams, mental health, wraparound case management, family advocacy and workforce development services.



Center for Hope’s children’s advocacy center features a highly trained service dog named **Manny**, a Zenlike black lab who has been a calming presence to numerous children and families engaging in the investigative process after disclosing, experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Manny is impeccably behaved, no matter the situation. Children and adults adore him. He seems magic, but in truth he is a carefully selected, well tended and highly trained “facility dog,” who went through over two years of rigorous training at Canine Companions for Independence, a national organization that trains

service dogs for adults, children, and veterans, and trains facility dogs (like Manny) to work with professionals in a visitation, education or healthcare setting. Manny is certified by an international accrediting body, Assistance Dogs International, which sets benchmarks to measure excellence in the assistance dog industry. Dogs like Manny – and their handlers – must pass specific tests and must conduct themselves with utmost safety, consistency and professionalism in a variety of public and private settings.



Maryland's court dog law provides guidelines for standards for "facility dogs" like Manny, and for "therapy dogs," which generally require less rigorous or lengthy training. Both types of dogs are recognized in Maryland courts under Maryland's current court dog law.

Having witnessed the powerful soothing effect Manny has on children and adults, Center for Hope believes this same comfort should be provided to veterans in court proceedings.

We thank Senator Simonaire for helping to create more trauma-friendly courts. We urge a favorable report for SB7, with the sponsor amendments as noted.

Joyce Lombardi, Director of Government Relations
Center for Hope
2300 North Charles Street
Baltimore MD 21218
410-429-7050

LifeBridge Health is a regional health system comprising Sinai Hospital of Baltimore, Levindale Geriatric Center and Hospital in Baltimore; Northwest Hospital; Carroll Hospital and Grace Medical Center (formerly Bon Secours). At LifeBridge Health and Center for Hope, we are committed to convening national best practice and trauma experts to respond to violence, abuse and exploitation of our area's most vulnerable populations.