



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

**February 6, 2025**

**Senate Bill 182**

**Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program – Eligibility – Family Members of Veterans**

**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

**Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

**Senate Bill 182** expands eligibility for the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program to include a spouse or dependent of an eligible veteran.

Veterans, who have selflessly served our country, often face unique challenges that can significantly impact their quality of life. Their families, as their primary support systems, also bear considerable emotional, logistical, and financial burdens. While family members may not have served in the military themselves, their unwavering support is essential to enabling service members to remain mission-focused, whether stationed domestically or abroad. These families often sacrifice stability and well-being to ensure that their loved ones can fulfill their duties, creating challenges that deserve recognition and support.

Expanding the service animal program to include eligible family members of veterans is a vital step toward addressing these challenges. Service members often divide their attention between their responsibilities and the well-being of their families at home. By extending access to service animals, families can receive the additional support they need, whether for mental health, medical conditions, or other daily challenges. Service animals play a critical role in enhancing the independence and quality of life of individuals who require assistance, providing life-saving support such as guiding individuals with visual impairments, preventing accidents, and alerting their handlers to medical needs. For example, service animals can notify individuals with conditions like diabetes or seizures of health changes, enabling them to take immediate, necessary actions. Statistics underscore the significant role service animals play: 45% are used for mental or psychiatric support, 34% for medical condition alerts, and 19% for mobility

assistance.<sup>1</sup> These trained animals can provide unparalleled emotional and practical support, reducing stress and improving daily functioning for both veterans and their families.

By expanding this program to include family members, we not only acknowledge the sacrifices made by veterans but also recognize the critical role their families play in their lives. Providing access to service animals ensures that veterans and their loved ones can thrive, fostering resilience and stability within their households. This bill ultimately strengthens the support network for those who have served our nation, allowing them and their families to continue contributing to the safety and well-being of our communities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **SB 182**.

Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10670951/#:~:text=Two%20hundred%20and%20four%20individuals%20teamed%20with%20a%20service%20dog,%2C%20or%20mobility%20\(19%25\).](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10670951/#:~:text=Two%20hundred%20and%20four%20individuals%20teamed%20with%20a%20service%20dog,%2C%20or%20mobility%20(19%25).)