

2025 SB0182 Testimony For 2025-02-06.pdf

Uploaded by: Alan Lang

Position: FAV

SB0182 – Favorable

Honorable Senators

I support expanding eligibility for the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program to include a spouse or dependent of an eligible veteran.

Please enter a favorable report for SB0182.

Alan Lang
45 Marys Mount Road
Harwood, Maryland 20776
410-336-9745
Alanlang1@verizon.net

Legislative District 30B
February 6, 2025

VeteransCaucusLegislationSupportLetter_SB182.pdf

Uploaded by: Benjamin Brooks

Position: FAV



MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
VETERANS CAUCUS

February 4, 2025

Senator Brian Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy & the Environment Committee
2W Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: SB182, Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program – Eligibility – Family Members of Veterans
Hearing Date: February 6, 2025

Dear Chairman Feldman,

Please let this letter serve as notice of the support of the Maryland General Assembly Senate Veterans Caucus for Senate Bill 182.

After review by our respective legislative committee, the Senate Veterans Caucus believes that the above-mentioned legislation would provide a valuable benefit to the veterans of the State of Maryland and requests a favorable report.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin T. Brooks".

Senator Benjamin Brooks
Senate Chair

cc: Senator Bryan Simonaire

Maryland Military Coalition SB0182 Written Testimo

Uploaded by: DAVID Dragics

Position: FAV



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

February 4, 2025

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Request for **FAVORABLE Report** – SB0182 – Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program – Eligibility – Family Members of Veterans

Dear Chair Feldman and distinguished members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), I write to recommend a **FAVORABLE report** by the Committee on **SB0182 – Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program – Eligibility – Family Members of Veterans**, sponsored by Senator Bryan Simonaire. This bill would expand the eligibility for this program to include a spouse or dependent of an eligible veteran.

Treatment or care from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or a Department of Defense (DoD) medical facility involves not only the veteran but also the veteran's family, that individual's primary support group that cares the most. This bill does not change the State's policy, it only expands the policy to eligible family members, who should be involved with and will benefit from any treatment from the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program.

The Maryland Military Coalition **strongly supports SB0182** and asks for a **FAVORABLE report** from the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a registered non-profit, nonpartisan advocacy organization comprised of 22 prominent Maryland-based veteran and military groups. It represents over 150,000 service-connected individuals, including those currently serving, veterans, retirees and their families, caregivers and survivors. Visit our website at <https://mdmilcoalition.org/>.

We want to thank Senator Simonaire for sponsoring this legislation and for supporting the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,

David L. Dragics
COL (Ret), U.S. Army
Legislative Director

Maryland Catholic Conference_FAV_SB182.pdf

Uploaded by: Diane Arias

Position: FAV



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.¹ 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.

¹[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).)

SB 182 Senator Simonaire_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV

BRYAN W. SIMONAIRE
Legislative District 31
Anne Arundel County

Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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11 Bladen Street, Room 320
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410-841-3658 · 301-858-3658
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Bryan.Simonaire@senate.state.md.us

The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Written Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 182

Chairman and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee, I am here to introduce and voice my support for Senate Bill 182 - *Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program - Eligibility - Family Members of Veterans*.

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

SB 182

Uploaded by: Kelly Rodgers

Position: FAV



LETTER OF SUPPORT

Senate Bill 182- SUPPORT

February 4, 2025

Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

Dear Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee:

Maryland Therapeutic Riding is a nonprofit organization that improves the quality of life of children, adults, active military and veterans by connecting humans and horses in a healing environment. This healing takes place while connecting the physical, psychological, and emotional aspects of working and bonding with horses in the natural setting of our farm.

MTR serves clients from ages 2 to 82 and works with children and adults with a wide range of challenges including, but not limited to the following: Anxiety, Depression, Traumatic Brain Injury, Developmental delays, Cerebral palsy, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Amputees, and more. Our equine-assisted services consist of adaptive riding, physical, speech, and occupational therapies, as well as equine-assisted psychotherapy.

Veterans and active military personnel make up approximately 10% of our participant population, and we hope to expand our services to better serve both military personnel and **their eligible family members** in the future. Wounded veterans and active military personnel, along with their families, can join any of our equine-assisted activities or therapy programs at MTR, free of charge. We are supportive of the efforts to include **eligible family members** in these services, recognizing that the therapeutic benefits extend not just to the individuals who have served, but also to their families, who often bear the emotional and psychological burdens of their loved ones' experiences.

MTR is deeply committed to providing these critical services, and we are constantly working to secure additional funding to ensure that our offerings grow, benefiting both service members and **eligible family members**. We fully support the addition of **eligible family members** as part of the services provided, as their involvement is crucial to the holistic recovery process.



1141 Sunrise Beach RD
Crownsville, MD 21032
www.horsethatheal.org

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Candid.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for a tour or to see our programs in action. Many of our participants, including those in our Equine Services for Heroes program, are available to advocate and share their stories about the positive impact these services have had on their lives and their families.

Maryland Therapeutic Riding fully supports Senate Bill 182, especially the expansion to include **eligible family members** in these services, and we look forward to the continued growth and impact of these vital programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kelly".

Kelly Rodgers

PATH Intl. Certified Master Instructor

Executive Director

Maryland Therapeutic Riding, Inc.

DVMF SB182 Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Morgan Murphy

Position: FAV



**Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families
Office of the Secretary**

**WES MOORE
GOVERNOR**

**ARUNA MILLER
LT. GOVERNOR**

**ANTHONY C. WOODS
SECRETARY**

**Senate Bill 182 - Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program - Eligibility -
Family Members of Veterans
SUPPORT**

February 3, 2025

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Room 241, Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members,

The Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF) is committed to leading veterans and their families through life's transitions, making Maryland the best state for the military-connected communities. DVMF fulfills its mission through five core programs: the Service and Benefits Program, which helps veterans access federal, state, and local earned benefits; Charlotte Hall Veterans Home, offering assisted living and skilled nursing care; the Cemetery and Memorial Program, providing dignified resting places and maintaining memorials honoring Maryland's veterans; the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program, fostering connection and awareness; and the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund, offering financial assistance to veterans and their families in need. These programs reflect Maryland's commitment to honoring and empowering its military-connected community.

The Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families supports Senate Bill 182 - Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program-Eligibility-Family Members of Veterans.

This legislation represents a critical step forward in recognizing the needs of military-connected families, ensuring they have access to life-changing service animals that can provide vital support in navigating the challenges associated with military and veteran life. Expanding eligibility to include spouses and dependents acknowledges the reality that military service impacts not just the veteran but the entire family. Many military spouses and children experience secondary effects of service-related injuries, including PTSD, anxiety, and mobility limitations, making access to service animals a meaningful addition to their care and well-being.

By broadening the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program, this bill will:

THE WINELAND BUILDING, FOURTH FLOOR
16 FRANCIS STREET, ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TOLL FREE: 866-793-1577 • ANNAPOLIS: 410-260-3838 • FAX: 410-216-7928

veterans.maryland.gov
TTY USERS CALL VIA MD RELAY

1. **Enhance Family Well-Being:** Many military families bear the emotional and physical burdens of service-connected disabilities. Providing service animals to spouses and dependents offers them additional support in managing daily life, reducing stress, and fostering a healthier family environment.
2. **Support Caregivers:** Spouses of veterans often serve as primary caregivers, facing emotional and physical strain. Service animals can alleviate some of this burden by assisting in daily tasks and providing emotional comfort.
3. **Improve Mental Health Outcomes:** Research shows that service animals contribute to reduced anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms. Extending this benefit to military-connected family members ensures a more holistic approach to mental health and resilience.
4. **Reduce Barriers to Support:** By allowing family members to access service animals, Maryland strengthens its commitment to ensuring military and veteran families have the tools and resources they need to thrive.

Thank you for your attention to this important proposal and I ask the committee for a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Woods". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and 'W'.

Anthony C. Woods
Secretary

SB 182

Uploaded by: Rick Yount

Position: FAV



14934 Schaeffer Road
Boys, MD 20841
301-260-1111
warriorcanineconnection.org



February 4, 2025

Senator Bryan W. Simonaire
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: MD Senate Bill 182

Dear Senator Simonaire,

I am writing to express our support for SB 182, the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program – Eligibility – Family Members of Veterans. The team at Warrior Canine Connection applauds your efforts to extend the program to caregivers, spouses and dependents.

As a Maryland-based non-profit organization serving Veterans through the healing power of the Warrior-Canine connection, we see first hand the positive impact on our Veterans and their families. We are very grateful to have the State of Maryland as a wonderful partner in carrying out this no-fail mission!

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to Maryland's Veterans, their caregivers, and their families!

Gratefully,

Rick

Rick Yount
Founder and Executive Director
Warrior Canine Connection
14934 Schaeffer Road
Boys, MD 20841
(301) 260-1111