



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 384

Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established

SUPPORT

CHAIR PENA-MELNYK, VICE CHAIR CULLISON, AND ESTEEMED MEMBERS OF THE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE,

I AM PLEASED TO PRESENT HB384, A BIPARTISAN BILL THAT WOULD ESTABLISH A DISABILITY SERVICE ANIMAL PROGRAM MIMICKING THE SUCCESSFUL SERVICE ANIMAL PROGRAM IN THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERAN AFFAIRS. THROUGH THE PARTNERSHIP OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITIES AND NONPROFITS IN THE BUSINESS OF TRAINING SERVICE ANIMALS, THIS BILL CREATES A GRANT PROGRAM THAT EXPANDS THE RESOURCES OF THE DEPARTMENT, SO THEY REACH CONSTITUENTS THAT NEED THEM.

THE PROGRAM ACHIEVES THIS BY DELEGATING THE POWER TO SELECT ONE OR MORE NONPROFITS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM. THEN WHEN CONSTITUENTS APPLY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM TO RECEIVE TRAINED SERVICE ANIMALS, ACCEPTED APPLICANTS WILL THEN BE ASSIGNED/REFERRED TO THE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT BEST FITS THEIR NEEDS. THROUGH THIS PROGRAM THE DEPARTMENT WILL BE ABLE TO PROVIDE GRANT MONEY TO THESE SELECTED NONPROFITS IN ORDER TO FUND THEIR TRAINING SERVICES AND NEEDS. IT IS UP TO THE ORGANIZATION TO MATCH THE APPLICANT WITH A SERVICE ANIMAL AND PROVIDE THE NECESSARY TRAINING FOR SUCCESSFUL SERVICE ANIMAL USE, ALL FREE OF CHARGE.

THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERAN AFFAIRS PROGRAM WAS REDESIGNED IN 2022, RESULTING IN THE HIRING OF A PART-TIME CONTRACTUAL EMPLOYEE TO MANAGE DAILY OPERATIONS. THE GRANT SPECIALIST OVERSEES VARIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE AND PROGRAMMATIC TASKS.

WITH THE NEW DESIGN, WITHIN TWO YEARS, THE PROGRAM HAS SERVED 500 VETERANS AND HAS PROVIDED MORE THAN 2,000 THERAPY SESSION AND TRAINED AND PLACED 15 SERVICE DOGS. 90 VOLUNTEERS HAVE BEEN TRAINED, AND 28 EQUINE THERAPY STAFF HAVE BEEN CERTIFIED BY PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. *ALL OF THIS TO SAY THAT A PROGRAM MODELLED AFTER THE DEPT. OF VETERAN'S AFFAIRS PROGRAM CAN HAVE A TREMENDOUS IMPACT FOR A MINIMAL EXPENSE.*

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