

Carol A. Beatty, Secretary  
Anne Blackfield, Deputy Secretary

Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor



**BILL: HB0384 – Maryland Disability Service Animal Program - Established**

**POSITION: Letter of Information**

COMMITTEE: HGO – Health and Government Operations

DATE: January 29, 2025

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk,

The Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) offers this letter of information regarding HB0384. This legislation would create the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program within MDOD. The MDOD Program would award grant funds to eligible non-profits that train service animals and refer eligible individuals who inquire about the program to these non-profits.

This legislation is modelled on the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program, which was created in 2017 and is operated by the Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF). We are indebted to DVMF and the dedicated staff who manage the Veterans Program for sharing information about the resources necessary to make programs like this successful.

This letter provides additional information about differences and similarities between the Veterans Program and the proposed MDOD Program as they relate to our fiscal note. DVMF has a part-time contractual program manager for the Veterans Program and has received an additional annual General Fund appropriation ranging from \$55,000 to \$250,000 for its grants. In our fiscal note, MDOD indicated a need for a full-time PIN and a \$170,000 appropriation to support the non-profit grants (based on the FY 2024 appropriation to the Veterans Program).

**The MDOD Program will have more eligible individuals than the Veterans Program.**

The Veterans Program is available to “eligible veterans,” defined at State Govt. Article Section 9-957(a)(2) as veterans living in Maryland or who are receiving treatment from a VA hospital in Maryland. According to the 2022 Annual Report from the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (now DVMF), there are approximately 360,000 veterans living in Maryland. We do not have data on the number, within that population, of veterans who have conditions that would benefit from use of a service dog.

We estimate that the MDOD Program may receive at least twice as many inquiries and referral requests from eligible individuals than the Veterans Program. HB0384 defines “eligible individuals” for the MDOD Program as an individual with a disability, as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act. No other eligibility restrictions are specified. There are about 707,000 Marylanders potentially eligible for the MDOD Program, based on the Maryland Department of Planning’s estimate that 11.6% of residents have disabilities.

## **The MDOD Program may have more non-profit candidates than the Veterans Program.**

According to a review of information from the Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) accreditation organizations, MDOD believes:

- *No single non-profit (in Maryland or nationally) appears to provide service animals trained to serve individuals with all disabilities.* Service animals perform tasks for people with different disabilities. The nature of these tasks and the necessary training varies widely. Service animal training programs accredited by ADI typically do not include service animals for people who are blind and may focus on specific disabilities. Service dogs for people who are blind or low vision (commonly referred to as “guide dogs”) are often trained by separate organizations that are accredited through IGDF. The approximately 10 dually accredited non-profits still do not appear to serve people with all types of disabilities.
- *There is only one accredited non-profit organization in Maryland that serves non-veterans.* According to its website, Fidos for Freedom in Laurel, MD (ADI-accredited) serves people who are over the age of 18; have hearing loss, mobility disabilities, or PTSD; and live within 75 miles of its facility because the program requires on-site training. (This non-profit also serves veterans.) There do not appear to be any Maryland-based IGDF-accredited non-profits.

The Veterans Program is restricted to awarding grant funds to Maryland non-profits (State Govt. Art. 9-957(d)(2)). In addition to Fidos for Freedom, there are two other ADI-accredited non-profits in Maryland that serve veterans, Hero Dogs and Warrior Canine Connection. The Veterans Program has awarded grants to both. We are unaware of any awards to unaccredited organizations.

HB0384 does not restrict grant awards to Maryland-based non-profits and would allow the MDOD Program to issue awards to multiple non-profits. Making grant awards to multiple non-profits, including in other states, would make the grants process more competitive and potentially open the MDOD Program to a wider range of people with disabilities.

We expect administering multiple out-of-state grants will make the MDOD Program more operationally complex. In this scenario, unlike the Veterans Program, the MDOD Program will need to develop multi-state marketing and outreach strategies to solicit non-profit applicants nationally and will likely receive more applications. This in turn would likely require more resources to review and select candidates, as well as a process to balance available grant funds with the need to serve a variety of disability groups. It may also require additional reporting for out-of-state grant awards to ensure funds are used to support Maryland residents.

## **Both programs have an operational impact requiring staff resources.**

While the Veterans Program did not begin with specially assigned staff, DVMF obtained a part-time (20 hours/week) contractual position that started in FY22. MDOD was advised by DBM that in FY 2026 and onwards, agencies should request PINs for long-term positions. We could explore the possibility of a part-time PIN with DBM. However, we believe that it will require more than part-time work to make the MDOD Program successful due to the operational demands described above.

MDOD does not have existing staff with 20 or more hours a week of available time to administer a new program. MDOD has 32 full-time PINs. Of those, only 10 are 100% funded by General Funds; the other 22 are funded partially or wholly by federal grants, special funds, or through memoranda of understanding with other agencies to perform specific activities that do not align with the MDOD Program. Of the 10 General Fund PINs, 5 are dedicated to other statutory requirements (the Attendant Care Program, the Statewide Autism Coordinator, and the Constituent Services Program). The other 5 are the Deputy Secretary, a fiscal officer, 2 staff supporting media communications and digital accessibility testing, and the Director of Behavioral Health Policy. The latter has been tasked with planning for the Individuals with Disabilities and Service-Disabled Veterans Boating Fund (Ch. 419 of 2024) while we wait for an appropriation to support staffing and grant awards for that program.

### **Both programs require support beyond private donations**

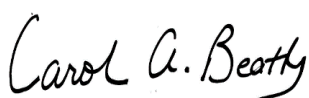
In our fiscal note, we cited DVMF's estimate that for the purposes of the Veterans Program, it costs about \$20,000 to train a service animal. Additional research suggests that for the purposes of the MDOD Program, grant awards of less than \$30,000 may not cover a non-profit's cost to serve an eligible individual requiring more complex service animal tasks than required by some participants in the Veterans Program. The \$170,000 MDOD recommended in the fiscal note for the grant awards would allow the Program to grant 4 to 6 awards a year (equivalent to the average cost of training 4 to 6 service animals for a range of disabilities).

Costs of training a service animal might range from \$10,000 (such as for mobility dogs) to \$50,000 (for guide dogs). These figures include costs related to veterinary care, food, training supplies, and compensation to trainers (which could be 120+ hours). These figures do not include costs incurred by the recipient of the service animal, who would be responsible for travel and lodging costs (if matched to an out-of-state non-profit that requires on-site training), as well as ongoing food and veterinary care costs associated with dog ownership or additional travel for follow-up training.

HB0384 authorizes the MDOD Program to put private donations towards the grant awards. The Veterans Program has a similar allowance. DVMF has advised that aside from an initial influx of donations totaling about \$10,000, they have received negligible amounts of private donations. While having a full-time staff person could increase capacity to seek outside funding, raising sufficient funds solely through private donations is unlikely.

MDOD fully recognizes the value that service animals have and the critical – and sometimes life-saving – role they play in individuals' lives. We thank you for the opportunity to provide information about the resources that would help ensure that the MDOD Program has a meaningful impact on the lives of Marylanders with disabilities.

Sincerely,



Carol A. Beatty, Secretary

## Attachment 1: Accredited Maryland Service Dog Assistance Programs

Organization Name	Contact Information	Address	Population/ Disabilities Served	Geographic Area Served
<a href="#">Fidos for Freedom, Inc.</a>	410-880-4178 <a href="mailto:office@fidosforfreedom.org">office@fidosforfreedom.org</a>	1200 Sandy Spring Rd, Laurel, MD 20707, USA	- Adults 18+ - Hearing loss - Mobility limitations - PTSD - Veterans/active military	75 mile radius of Laurel, MD
<a href="#">Hero Dogs Inc.</a>	1-888-570-8653 <a href="mailto:hero@hero-dogs.org">hero@hero-dogs.org</a>	PO Box 64 Brookeville, MD 20833	Veterans/first responders with: - Physical disabilities - Mobility limitations - Hearing loss - Psychiatric Disabilities - Sexual trauma	50 mile radius of zip code 20882
<a href="#">Warrior Canine Connection, Inc.</a>	301-260-1111 <a href="mailto:info@warriorcanineconnection.org">info@warriorcanineconnection.org</a>	14934 Schaeffer Rd, Boyds, MD 20841, USA	Veterans train service dogs for other veterans living with: - PTSD/psychiatric disabilities - Mobility impairments	United States

**Source:**

Assistance Dogs International, "Results for Members Serving Maryland." <https://assistancedogsinternational.org/member-search/maryland/>

## Attachment 2: ADI and IGDF Accredited Out-of State Organizations Serving Marylanders

*Note: This list has not been reviewed to determine whether any of these programs only serve veterans, first responders, or other specific professions. Bold text indicates organizations accredited by both Assistance Dogs International and International Guide Dog Federation.*

State	Organization Name/Address
Arizona	Power Paws Assistance Dogs – Phoenix, AZ – ADI
California	Canine Support Teams – Murrieta, CA – ADI Early Alert Canines – Concord, CA – ADI Good Dog! Service Canines – Fallbrook, CA – ADI <b>Guide Dogs for the Blind – San Rafael, CA – ADI &amp; IGDF</b> <b>Guide Dogs of America/Tender Loving Canines – Sylmar, CA – ADI &amp; IGDF</b> <b>Guide Dogs of the Desert – Palm Springs, CA – ADI &amp; IGDF</b> Little Angels Service Dogs – Jamul, CA - ADI
Colorado	Freedom Service Dogs of America – Englewood, CO – ADI Paragon Service Dogs - Longmont, CO - ADI
Connecticut	ECAD, Educated Canines Assisting Disabilities - Torrington, CT - ADI FIDELCO Guide Dog Foundation – Bloomfield, CT – IGDF
Florida	<b>Dogs, Inc. – Palmetto, FL – ADI &amp; IGDF</b>
Illinois	Got your Six Support Dogs – Maryville, IL - ADI
Iowa	Retrieving Freedom, Inc. – Waverly, IA – ADI
Kansas	KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc. – Washington, KS – ADI
Massachusetts	NEADS World Class Service Dogs – Princeton, MA - ADI
Michigan	<b>Leader Dogs for the Blind – Rochester, MI – ADI &amp; IGDF</b> Paws With a Cause – Wayland, MI – ADI
Missouri	Retrieving Freedom, Inc. – Sedalia, MO - ADI
New Hampshire	Assistance Canine Training Services (ACTS) – Center Conway, NH - ADI
New Jersey	<b>The Seeing Eye, Inc.- Morristown, NY – ADI &amp; IGDF</b>
New Mexico	Assistance Dogs of the West – Santa Fe, NM - ADI
New York	<b>America’s VetDogs – Smithtown, NY – ADI &amp; IGDF</b> Canine Companions – Medford, NY - ADI

217 EAST REDWOOD STREET, SUITE 1300, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21202

VOICE/TTY 410-767-3660 VOICE/TTY 1-800-637-4113 FAX 410-333-6674 EMAIL [info.mdod@maryland.gov](mailto:info.mdod@maryland.gov)



	<p><b>Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, Inc., Smithtown, NY – ADI &amp; IGDF</b></p> <p>Freedom Guide Dogs, Cassville, NY – IGDF</p> <p>Guiding Eyes for the Blind – Yorktown Heights, NY – IGDF</p> <p>Puppies Behind Bars - New York, NY - ADI</p>
North Carolina	<p>Canines for Service, Inc. – Washington, NC - ADI</p> <p>paws4people – Wilmington, NC - ADI</p>
North Dakota	<p>Service Dogs for America (Great Plains Assistance Dogs Foundation) – Jud, ND - ADI</p>
Ohio	<p><b>Pilot Dogs – Columbus, OH – ADI &amp; IGDF</b></p>
Oregon	<p>Bergin College of Canine Studies. Canyonville, OR – ADI</p> <p>Dogs for Better Lives – Central Point, OR – ADI</p>
Pennsylvania	<p>Canine Partners for Life – Cochranville, PA - ADI</p> <p>Susquehanna Service Dogs – Grantville, PA - ADI</p> <p>UDS Service Dogs Program – Lancaster, PA - ADI</p>
Texas	<p>Patriot PAWS Service Dogs – Rockwell, TX - ADI</p>
Virginia	<p>Mutts With a Mission – Virginia Beach, VA - ADI</p> <p>Paws for Purple Hearts-Virginia – Ruther Glen, VA - ADI</p>
Wyoming	<p>K9's 4 Mobility, Inc. – Cheyenne, WY – ADI</p>

Sources:

Assistance Dogs International, "Results for Members Serving Maryland." <https://assistancedogsinternational.org/member-search/maryland/>

International Guide Dog Federation, "Guide Dogs in North America." <https://www.igdf.org.uk/closest-dog-guide-providers/north-america/>



### Attachment 3: How Much Does It Cost to Train a Service Animal

The cost to train a service animal can vary widely, depending on the type of dog and the type of training required.

- **Guide dogs:** Can cost between \$20,000 and \$60,000
- **Mobility assistance dogs:** Can cost between \$15,000 and \$30,000
- **Hearing dogs:** Can cost between \$20,000 and \$25,000
- **Seizure alert dogs:** Can cost between \$15,000 and \$50,000
- **PTSD support dogs:** Can cost between \$10,000 and \$30,000
- **Autism support dogs:** Can cost between \$10,000 and \$30,000

Other factors that can affect the cost include:

- The breed of dog
- The tasks the dog will perform
- Whether the dog requires specialized training
- The length of time it takes the dog to learn

In addition to the initial training cost, you can expect to spend an average of \$1,200 per year on ongoing care. This includes food, veterinary care, vaccinations, and toys. This does not include costs of additional training. Some organizations may offer financial aid or payment arrangements to help with the costs.

Sources:

U.S. Service Animals, "The Cost of a Trained Service Dog.."

<https://usserviceanimals.org/blog/service-dog-cost/?srsltid=AfmBOos1MeGGfP3uRnluY5xnUI0HkhkUwNidBn14JIBBbXh8quFqe0r>

Shifano, Joseph. "Service Dog Training Cost: Investing in Lifelong Independence." October 23, 2023.

<https://www.theacademyofpetcareers.com/blog/service-dog-training-cost/#average-costs>