

**SB 0090 - Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program - Definitions
Maryland Horse Council, (Christy Clagett), SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT**

Hearing before the Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee,
January 23, 2020

The Maryland Horse Council (MHC) is a membership-based, umbrella trade association of the entire horse industry in Maryland. Our membership includes horse farms and stables, horse-related businesses, and horse owners, representing all facets of the Maryland equestrian community, from the owners of race horses to the owners of trail horses or just beloved retired companion horses. As such, we represent over 30,000 Marylanders.



MHC supports the laudable goal of ensuring the safety and welfare of veterans enrolled in equine therapy programs, and of the horses who serve them. However, we believe that the definition of “therapy horse” as included in SB 0090 is incapable of implementation as a practical matter, and therefore does not advance that goal.

SB 0090 defines “therapy horse” as “A HORSE TRAINED FOR INTERACTIONS WITH VETERANS BY A PROFESSIONALLY ACCREDITED EQUINE THERAPY PROGRAM.”

A couple of issues arise when considering this definition.

- The bill does not define a “professionally accredited equine therapy program,” so it is not clear how a facility providing equine therapy to veterans could comply with the law if enacted.
- As far as we are aware, there are currently no “professionally accredited equine therapy programs” that actually train horses.

Although there are a number of national and international organizations (e.g., PATH Intl.) that in some cases set professional standards and in a few cases certify human instructors and physical facilities, we are not aware of any that train horses, which for obvious reasons cannot be done remotely. Therefore, the bill could be interpreted to require that each local, nonprofit, equine therapy program and/or its own instructors and trainers go through the process of becoming officially certified by some other organization. We understand that such processes can be lengthy and very expensive - potentially beyond the reach of many local programs that have operated for years with great track records of safety and success.

We note that the definitions of service and support dogs in the bill do not require such certifications by third party organizations.

Finally, the Fiscal Note for this bill states that there will be no local or small business effect. For the reasons stated above, we believe that is inaccurate.

Therefore, we recommend that the definition of “therapy horse” in the bill be re-worked as follows: “THERAPY HORSE” INCLUDES A HORSE DEEMED APPROPRIATE FOR INTERACTIONS WITH VETERANS BY A FACILITY THAT IS A MARYLAND LICENSED STABLE, AND THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA TO QUALIFY AS A PATH INTL. MEMBER CENTER.

This definition ensures that the horses are acceptable according to professionally recognized standards, without imposing undue financial burden on some of the smaller but still very worthy nonprofits providing equine therapy to veterans.

Respectfully submitted,

The Maryland Horse Council

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