

Cyphers_FAV_SB412

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February 13, 2020

SB 412 - Public Safety - Law Enforcement - Veterinary Care of Retired Law Enforcement K-9s Act - SUPPORT

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

The Maryland Veterinary Medical Association (MDVMA) was established in 1886 and is the largest professional and advocacy organization for veterinarians and technicians in Maryland. MDVMA's mission is to serve as a leading resource for the veterinary community through communication, education, representation and support for the advancement of animal and public health in Maryland. Our members are licensed practitioners in the fields of small animal, equine and food animal health.

MDVMA strongly supports the creation of a Compassion Care Fund to offset veterinary costs for retired service canines.

Please see the testimony below from Dr. Jim Peterson, DVM about his experience caring for Maryland K-9s.

"I have had the honor and privilege to hold the contract for discounted veterinary services for the Prince George's County Police Canines for the past 15+ years. This includes the Department of Corrections, the Sheriff's Department and the Fire/EMS service canines also. We also offer non-contracted discounted veterinary services for the Cities of Bowie, Hyattsville, Takoma Park and Seat Pleasant police canines. Most importantly, we offer discounted veterinary services to these working dogs once they are retired and adopted by their handlers. Here are a few reasons why I believe that the creation of a Compassion Care Fund for retired service canines is the right thing to do.

Working K-9's put their lives on the line every day to serve and protect. These dogs provide protection, extraction, search & rescue, and detection (bombs, weapons, drugs) services in their line of duty. While working, they receive the very best medical care available through government funding.

The relationship between handler and canine is like no other. They protect each other, literally, with their lives. It makes the most sense for retired canines to go home with their handlers to become household pets after retiring from active service. The handlers should be commended for their dedication to their working canine partner. Many of these working dogs live with their handler during their working career already; it makes sense for the canines to stay with their handlers in retirement.

The average working career of a service canine is 6-9 years. Their intense training and workload usually result in forced retirement due to injury. Their lifespan is longer. It is important to provide medical care for the canines after their retirement. Unfortunately, the canines do not receive a pension.

Injuries in the line of duty, causing them to be removed from service, often require increased veterinary care and subsequent cost. The handlers often are faced with the difficult decision to be able to provide continued medical care versus euthanasia due to cost. These service canines and their handlers deserve better after dedicating their lives to serving the public.

Maryland Veterinary Medical Association
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I am honored to be able to care for the police canines and other service canines in our community. The integrity of these programs and the dedication of the handlers is unmatched. The canines, themselves, are amazing creatures. The creation of a Compassion Care Fund to offset veterinary expenses for retired canines by private donations with an annual and lifetime cap is a concept that is, in hindsight, long overdue.”

Establishing a fund to support retired law enforcement dogs makes sense. Often times, they are adopted by their professional partners and work until they are nearly forced to retire. Providing for comfortable end of life and regular veterinary care for our K-9 state and local law enforcement employees is a great idea. As an association, we applaud Sen. Kramer for introducing this legislation and offer our strong support in favor of SB 412.

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Morningstar_MoCo_FAV_SB 412

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SB 412

DATE: February 13, 2020

SPONSOR: Senator Kramer, *et al.*

ASSIGNED TO: Judicial Proceedings

CONTACT PERSON: Sara Morningstar (sara.morningstar@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: SUPPORT (Montgomery County Department of Police)

Public Safety – Law Enforcement – Veterinary Care of Retired Law Enforcement K-9s Act

Senate Bill 412 would require State and local law enforcement agencies to reimburse individuals adopting publicly owned dogs used for law enforcement (K-9s) for reasonable and necessary veterinary care. A special, non-lapsing “K-9 Compassionate Care Fund” would be established under the bill to cover up to \$2,500 a year for usual and customary veterinary treatment and not to exceed \$10,000 over the life of the dog. Montgomery County Department of Police (MCPD) supports this bill.

Adopting a retired police dog can be a very rewarding but expensive undertaking on the new owner, according to MCPD. Most of the time, the dogs are retired because of age, generally around 10 years old. While these animals are highly intelligent, the stress of their work can lead to unintended consequences, including behavioral and health changes requiring costly veterinary care. By establishing a non-lapsing K-9 fund to reimburse owners for certain necessary veterinary care, law enforcement will be better positioned to assist adopters with medical bills and provide an opportunity to give these dogs a chance to just be a pet in their final years.

Montgomery County Department of Police supports SB 412 and would urge the Committee to adopt a favorable report.