

Carol A. Beatty, Secretary
Anne Blackfield, Deputy Secretary

Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor



BILL: SB 157 – Maryland Disability Service Animal Program - Established

POSITION: Letter of Information

COMMITTEE: HGO – Health and Government Operations

DATE: March 19, 2025

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk,

The Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) offers this letter of information regarding SB 157, which would create the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program within MDOD. SB 157 is modelled on legislation that created a service animal program in the Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF).

We are indebted to DVMF for sharing information about the resources necessary to make their program operational and successful; their feedback formed the basis for MDOD's fiscal note. The DVMF program receives State funds for a dedicated program manager and, beginning in 2019, has received an additional annual State appropriation ranging from \$55,000 to \$250,000 for its grants. Support from the General Assembly has been critical to the program's ability to issue these grants.

The training for different types of service dogs varies according to the tasks the dog will be performing. No single non-profit (in Maryland or nationally) trains dogs that can meet the needs of all people with disabilities. There is one accredited non-profit in Maryland that trains service dogs for non-veterans with disabilities; it serves people over age 18 who live within 75 miles of the training facility and have hearing loss, mobility disabilities, or PTSD. Most Marylanders with disabilities who have a service dog from an accredited training program likely acquired the dog from a for-profit program or from one of the 40+ out-of-state non-profits that serve Marylanders.

Costs of training a service animal for a person with a disability might range from \$10,000 (such as for mobility dogs) to \$50,000 (for guide dogs for blind users). Service animals are typically not covered by insurance. People who receive service animals may have to pay out of pocket or engage in private fundraising. Non-profits also do extensive fundraising such that some provide dogs at no cost to the recipient. DVMF has received a total of \$12,000 in private donations between 2017 and present; private donors often prefer to donate directly to individuals or 501(c)(3)'s. State agencies must also comply with restrictions placed on State agency fundraising by State ethics requirements.

Thank you for your interest in supporting Marylanders with disabilities who use service dogs.

Sincerely,

Carol A. Beatty

Carol A. Beatty, Secretary

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