



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

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January 28, 2021

To: House Judiciary Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chairman, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Criminal Law – Harm to Service Animals - Support.

Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chairman Atterbeary, members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chairman of the Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc. Our mission is to champion legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. On behalf of our board of directors and our thousands of members across Maryland, I urge you to support Criminal Law –Harm to Service Animals – HB 234.

This bill would strengthen penalties for causing harm to service animals. Service animals are different than animals who are adopted as pets. Pets are adopted for companionship. While they may be beloved members of the family, they are not residing with the family in order to provide a vital service to a family member with disabilities.

The Americans With Disabilities Act defines Service Animals "...as dogs and miniature horses that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities." These animals undergo vigorous training in order to perform their duties. While their owners often develop strong bonds with the animal, service animals are there to help. They perform vital tasks and lifesaving duties including guiding the blind, aiding the deaf, alerting and protecting a person from increased harm during a seizure, reminding a person to take medication, and more.

Our treasurer's adult daughter is able to live on her own thanks to her big, black seeing eye Labrador who takes her everywhere in Baltimore City, including her Braille classes. If this dog were to be injured or killed, she would most likely be unable to live independently and would have to move home with her parents. In short, penalties for harming these service animals, often on whom their owners very survival depends, must be increased to reflect the seriousness of the integral role that they serve for their owners and to society.

I would like to thank Delegate Williams for her sponsorship of HB 234 and request a favorable report.

Let Kindness Reign, Vote Humane

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January 25, 2021