



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

January 29, 2021

Judiciary Committee

HB234

Criminal Law - Harm to Service Animals

FAVORABLE

The Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our members and supporters in Maryland, urge a favorable report on HB234, "Criminal Law – Harm to Service Animals." This bill would strengthen the penalties for causing harm to service animals, creating more robust protections for these amazing animals.

A service animal is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. To succeed the service animal must have the right temperament and extensive training. These animals are valuable not just for the time and cost invested in their training, but because of their dedication, loyalty, and temperament that enables them to succeed in a highly demanding role.

Individuals with disabilities may use service animals for a variety of reasons, but ultimately the role of these animals is to enable their owners to navigate all the situations they may encounter throughout a day, to remain focused on their handler and attentive to his or her needs, and to react proactively to a dangerous situation. When a service animal is injured, particularly if that injury comes from intentional harm, it can render the animal incapable of performing its job due to fear or nervousness that render the animal unable to remain focused on its handler. This causes an unfair stress on the animal and puts the handler in a dangerous situation.

By the nature of their jobs, service animals are required to be exposed to a wide variety of public encounters. They serve their handlers loyally and deserve protection should they be harmed in the performance of their duties. For these reasons, HSUS urges a favorable report on HB234.