



NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF THE BLIND
MARYLAND

Live the life you want.

Subject: Support for HB234

To: House Judiciary Committee

From: National Federation of the Blind of Maryland
Sharon Maneki
9013 Nelson Way
Columbia, MD 21045

Date: January 28, 2021

Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland, the oldest and largest consumer organization of blind persons in the state, urge the House Judiciary Committee to give a favorable report on HB234, Criminal Law – Harm to Service Animals.

Service animals are not pets. Service animals are a lifeline to the people with disabilities that they serve. They help the individual maintain their independence by providing a variety of supports. Service animals guide blind people, alert deaf people to phone calls or visitors at the door, pull people in wheelchairs, and offer emotional support, such as relieving anxiety.

HB234 is necessary because if a service animal is harmed or injured, the person with the disability is also harmed because they will have difficulties performing the essential functions of life. Therefore, it is appropriate to define harming a service animal as a crime and to create penalties. The bill reads, in part: “as a condition of sentencing, the court shall order a defendant convicted of violating this section to pay, in addition to fines and costs, full restitution for all damages arising out of the offense.” This provision of the bill is definitely needed because of the tremendous impact on the life of the person with the disability that comes with the loss of a service animal. The individual needs to be compensated because even if the animal physically recovers, they often are traumatized and cannot perform the functions they performed before the injury.

Please vote in favor of HB234 so that persons with disabilities can continue to live a full and meaningful life.