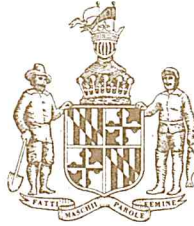


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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

***TESTIMONY - SENATE BILL 607***  
***CRIMINAL LAW – HARM TO SERVICE ANIMALS***  
***JUDICIARY COMMITTEE***  
***APRIL 1, 2021***

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Committee Members:

Thousands of Marylanders with physical and emotional challenges rely on service animals to preform everyday tasks and to function in society. These animals provide a variety of methods of assistance to those with visual, auditory, and emotional impairments. These methods of assistance cannot be easily retrained and when an individual with such challenges loses the services of their support animal, they often lose their ability to efficiently navigate everyday life.

Senate Bill 607 is a straightforward piece of legislation that seeks to make clear the value of service animals and to strengthen the penalties for those who intentionally (or recklessly) kill or injure them. If enacted, this bill would make a violation of this type a misdemeanor punishable by up to five years in prison and/or a maximum \$5,000 fine. Additionally, it would require those guilty of an offense to pay full restitution for the veterinary expenses or replacement of the service animal.

The average upfront cost for a service animal typically ranges from \$15,000 to \$30,000 (and more in some cases depending on the type of services that the animal provides). Due to the amount of training that these animals receive, and the unique capabilities that they provide, their value is clearly different than that of a household pet and uniquely worthy of the strengthened protections that this legislation would create. Strengthening these protections will simply recognize the critical role that service animals play in the lives of many individuals facing challenges.

**For the reasons listed above, I ask for a favorable report of Senate Bill 607.**