



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HOUSE BILL 608

Human Relations--Housing Discrimination—Service Dogs and Guide Dogs

February 21, 2023

SUPPORT

MR. CHAIRMAN, MR. VICE CHAIRMAN AND ESTEEMED COLLEAGUES: I AM PLEASED TO PRESENT HB 608, WHICH PROHIBITS DISCRIMINATION AGAINST INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO RETAIN THEIR FORMER SERVICE OR GUIDE DOG AFTER ITS RETIREMENT FROM SERVICE. THE INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY SHALL BE EXEMPT FROM ANY PROVISION IN THEIR LEASE OR RENTAL AGREEMENT WHICH PROHIBITS THE KEEPING OF DOGS. THEY WILL STILL BE HELD LIABLE FOR ANY DAMAGE TO THE PREMISES MADE BY THE DOG AND MAY STILL BE REQUIRED TO PAY AN ADDITIONAL PET FEE. THE PURPOSE OF THIS BILL IS TO RECOGNIZE THE SERVICES RETIRED SERVICE DOGS CONTINUE TO PROVIDE THEIR OWNERS AND PROHIBIT LANDLORDS FROM DISCRIMINATING AGAINST THOSE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WHO RETAIN THEIR RETIRED SERVICE DOGS.

SERVICE DOGS PROVIDE LIFE CHANGING ASSISTANCE TO A VARIETY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES SUCH AS MOBILITY ISSUES, SENSORY ISSUES SUCH AS BLINDNESS OR HEARING LOSS, EPILEPSY, AND POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER, TO NAME A FEW. WHILE MANY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WHO UTILIZE SERVICE DOGS MAY REQUIRE A SERVICE DOG FOR THEIR WHOLE LIVES, SERVICE DOGS CAN ONLY WORK AN AVERAGE OF 8 YEARS AND EVENTUALLY MUST RETIRE. THIS MEANS THAT FOR AN INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY, THEY MAY HAVE SEVERAL SERVICE DOGS THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES. HOWEVER, A SERVICE DOG "RETIRING" DOES NOT

MEAN THEY STOP SERVING THEIR OWNER. RETIRED SERVICE DOGS CONTINUE TO SERVE THEIR OWNER AT HOME BECAUSE THEY CAN'T TURN OFF THEIR SERVICE DOG TRAINING. THEREFORE, RETIRED SERVICE DOGS CONTINUE TO HELP PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES RETAIN AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TO USE AND ENJOY A DWELLING AS REQUIRED BY THE ADA (AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT) AND FHA (FAIR HOUSING ACT). ADDITIONALLY, THERE ARE OFTEN LONG WAITLISTS FOR SERVICE DOGS WHICH PUTS INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AT RISK OF NOT HAVING ANY SERVICE DOG, WHETHER ACTIVE OR RETIRED, IF THEIR LANDLORD DOES NOT ALLOW THEM TO KEEP THEIR RETIRED DOG.

FURTHERMORE, THERE ARE MANY ISSUES THAT ARE ASSOCIATED WITH REHOMING RETIRED SERVICE DOGS. OLDER DOGS ARE MUCH LESS LIKELY TO BE ADOPTED, MARYLAND ANIMAL SHELTERS ARE OVERWHELMED BY THE NUMBER OF ANIMALS THEY RECEIVE, AND EUTHANASIA RATES IN MARYLAND ARE STAGGERING. IN 2021, MARYLAND SHELTERS TOOK IN 58,041 ANIMALS AND HAD TO EUTHANIZE 8,431 (14.5%). ALLOWING RETIRED SERVICE DOGS TO BE TREATED AS ACTIVE SERVICE DOGS IN TERMS OF HOUSING WOULD LESSEN THE NUMBER OF RETIRED GUIDE DOGS GOING TO SHELTERS OR BEING EUTHANIZED. ADDITIONALLY, THIS BILL WOULD SPARE THE OWNERS OF RETIRED SERVICE DOGS THE EMOTIONAL HEARTBREAK OF HAVING TO PART WITH THEIR SERVICE ANIMAL.

MR. CHAIR, COLLEAGUES, I ASK FOR YOUR FAVORABLE REPORT OF HB 365.