



# State of Maryland Commission on Civil Rights

*Respect...Integrity...Effective Communication*

March 28, 2023

## **Senate Bill 535 – Human Relations – Housing Discrimination – Service Dogs**

### **POSITION: Support**

Dear Chairperson Barve, Vice Chairperson Stein, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee.

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, health services, and state contracts based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, and source of income.

Senate Bill 535 proposes amending Section 20–706 of the State Government Article to add protections against discrimination for disabled individuals who have a service dog. The bill includes those individuals whose dog is retired from service. These individuals would be exempt from provisions that prohibit keeping dogs in a rental property or that require paying any cost to keep the retired service dog.

Service dogs are different than dogs adopted purely as pets. They provide a vital service to an individual with disabilities. These animals undergo training to perform their duties and be very well-behaved canine citizens. They perform vital tasks and lifesaving duties including guiding the blind and aiding the deaf. SB 535 eliminates a source of discrimination against persons with disabilities in housing.

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights supports SB 535 with the added amendments. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. MCCR looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to improve and promote civil rights in Maryland.

*“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”*

William Donald Schaefer Tower, 6 Saint Paul Street, Suite 900, Baltimore, Maryland 21202-1631  
Phone: 410-767-8600 · Toll Free: 1-800-637-6247 · Maryland Relay: 711 · Fax: 410-333-1841  
Website: [mccr.maryland.gov](http://mccr.maryland.gov) · E-Mail: [mccr@maryland.gov](mailto:mccr@maryland.gov)

**Governor**  
Wes Moore

**Lt. Governor**  
Aruna Miller

**Commission Chair**  
Stephanie Suerth, MPA,  
CCEP

**Commission Vice Chair**  
Janssen E. Evelyn, Esq.

**Commissioners**  
Diane E. Bernier  
Eileen M. Levitt, SPHR,  
SHRM-SCP  
Rabbi Binyamin  
Marwick  
Magdalena S. Navarro,  
MSc  
Jeff Rosen  
Gina McKnight-Smith,  
PharmD, MBA  
Isabella Firth Shycoff

**Officers**  
**Executive Director**  
Alvin O. Gillard

**Deputy Director**  
Cleveland L. Horton II

**Assistant Director**  
Martine Chery

**General Counsel**  
Glendora C. Hughes

**Director of Education  
& Outreach**  
Kara N. Hunt, Ph.D.