

To: House Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Stephanie Flynt

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Subject: Support for SB535 – Housing Discrimination – Service Dogs and Guide Dogs

Please support SB535 and reduce the uncertainty blind people face around retiring their guide dog and housing stabilization.

Nala Belle is my first dog. After a 30 second introductory belly scratch, she jumped up and ran towards her guide dog harness, and thus, our working partnership began. We have been a successful working team for 7.5 years: making our way through college courses, extracurricular activities, and internships; moving halfway across the country for my first job after college, and then to another city for my current job; figuring out how to social distance when at the grocery store during the Covid-19 pandemic; making sure I walked down the steps as opposed to physically falling off the stage after singing and playing the piano at my momma's celebration of life/memorial service.

As it applies to housing under the current law, service animal users can be subject to pay a one-time pet fee or reoccurring pet rent. In some cases, the service animal user may even have to choose between figuring out an alternative living arrangement for their service animal or vacating an affordable, accessible long-term renting situation that is in a walkable area or close to public transportation. Adjusting to retirement is hard enough for the service animal and the user without having to factor in these logistics.

I don't like to think about it, but I know there will come a day when I hang up Nala Belle's harness for the last time. While I don't know exactly when that day will come, I do know that her training and obedience skills will stay intact. A lot can change when a service animal retires, but the house manners my girl has known since puppyhood will no doubt remain the same as they are in her working career.

Today I urge you to vote yes on SB535, which would close this loophole in the law by ensuring Marylanders with service animals, like myself, are not financially penalized for wanting to keep their service animal's beyond retirement.