



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**



February 23, 2023

To: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc. and Jennifer Bevan – Dangel, The Humane Society of the United States
Re: Human Relations- Housing Discrimination – Service Dogs and Guide Dogs – SB 535 - Favorable

Chair Smith, Vice - Chair Waldstreicher, members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chair of Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals and the Humane Society of the United States, I respectfully ask that the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee vote favorably for Human Relations - Housing Discrimination – Service Dogs and Guide Dogs – SB 535.

This bill would prohibit a person from discriminating in the sale or rental of, or otherwise making unavailable or denying, a dwelling to an individual with a disability who has, obtains, or retains a certain service dog or guide dog.

Service and guide dogs are different than dogs adopted purely as pets. While service and guide dogs may become treasured and beloved members of the family, they provide a vital service to an individual with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act defines Service Animals "...as animals/dogs ... that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities."

These animals undergo vigorous training to perform their duties and must be very well-behaved canine citizens to graduate from their programs. While their owners often develop strong bonds with the animal, service animals are there to help. They perform vital tasks and lifesaving duties including guiding the blind, aiding the deaf, alerting and protecting a person from increased harm during a seizure, reminding a person to take medication, and more.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, service dogs are legally entitled to accompany their owners under the Americans with Disabilities Act into all service establishments as they provide a specific service and are protected under the law. Using that standard, if a service or guide dog can go into a shop or restaurant, they should also be permitted to reside in disabled person's dwelling.

Retired service and guide dogs have lived most of their lives as model canine citizens dedicated to service. They should be allowed to live out their senior years with their owners, free from the fear that once they have retired, they would not be welcome.

By passing SB 535, we ensure that disabled people and dedicated working service or guide dogs – including beloved retired service or guide dogs who have dedicated their best years to helping others – can live together and are protected under the law.

Thanks to Senator James for sponsoring SB 535. I urge the committee to give this bill a favorable report.

Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, Maryland State Director
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