

MD Blind and Deaf Service Animal Program Legislati

Uploaded by: Bryan Williams

Position: FAV

I am writing on behalf of Dogs for Better Lives, writing to express our strong support for SB 796, the Maryland Blind and Deaf Service Animal Program. Dogs for Better Lives (DBL) is an organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of individuals through the placement of highly trained Service Dogs, and we believe that this bill is crucial in increasing funding and access to individuals in the deaf and hard of hearing community.

Increasing the available funding for these life-changing service dogs will significantly enhance DBL's capacity to train and place more hearing dogs. As evidenced by the words of our Maryland-based client who takes his Hearing Service Dog to work with him at the White House, these dogs provide additional independence and safety.

“Jamie has added a strong sense of reassurance and heightened awareness in my life. He is always in tune with his surroundings and never fails to let me know when there are important sounds. He is the alarm master! Oven and smoke alarms - even phones! He will search high and low for me to alert me to a sound. I know that I’ll never miss alarm with Jamie around!”

It is our experience that there is a clear demand for Hearing Service Dogs in Maryland. We have several individuals in the state currently on our organization’s waitlist and multiple active Hearing Dog Teams.

DBL has a rich history as the oldest provider of professionally trained Hearing Service Dogs in the United States, having placed 1,700 dogs nationally since 1977. Our Hearing Dog program currently has nearly two dozen deserving individuals on our wait list. However, with wait times up to 3 years to receive a dog, there remains a significant portion of individuals in Maryland and across the nation who require Hearing Service Dogs but do not have access to them.

Hearing Service Dogs are trained to alert to specific household sounds by making physical contact (jumping on you or nosing their handler) then leading the handler to the sound. Core household sounds include the smoke alarm, oven timer, name call, baby cry, door knock, phone, and alarm clock. We also train the dogs to alert to sounds in public and provide additional training to clients for personalized alerts.

The time and commitment to train Service Dogs is significant. It takes approximately 4-6 months to professionally train a Hearing Service Dog, and that time is even longer for purpose-bred dogs who are supported from birth to 14 months of age by our organization in collaboration with volunteer Puppy Raisers. In addition to the funding and time required to train and place a Hearing Service Dog, it is essential to also consider the lifetime commitment involved, which includes ongoing support and client follow-ups throughout the life of the team.

A 2021 study in the UK, known as the PEDRO study, showed that people who had received a Hearing Service Dog had increased wellbeing and were less dependent on others. The study also found that Hearing Service Dog recipients had significant less feelings of isolation and fear, both in their home and out in public.

We believe the establishment of the Maryland Blind and Deaf Service Animal Program has the potential to significantly enhance the quality of life for deaf or hard-of-hearing adults, offering them not only companionship but also independence and safety.

In conclusion, we express our support for SB 796, as it will increase access and funding for Hearing Service Dogs so that more individuals in Maryland can access these life-changing dogs.

SB0796_DanielleMcCann_FAV

Uploaded by: Danielle McCann

Position: FAV

Favorable SB796: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established

Date: March 7, 2024

From: Danielle McCann

113 Wells Ave Glen Burnie, MD 21061

dmccann@nfb.org

To: Senate Finance Committee

My name is Danielle McCann. I have had my guide dog Cammie for just over one year. In total I have had five dogs.

I have had many opportunities with my guide dogs. for instance, I earned a bachelor's degree, I've traveled and worked across the country in my jobs as Marketing Coordinator, Customer Service Operations Manager, and Membership Building Coordinator. I have participated in tons of community events such as being part of the social media team for Fiesta de la Flor, a popular event in Corpus Christi, Texas which honors the late singer Selena, teaching crochet classes, and volunteering at the Baltimore Running Festival. Most of all, I can travel independently and with confidence because I have a guide dog.

Please give other blind people the opportunity to gain confidence and freedom of movement. Vote in favor of SB796.

Maryland Catholic Conference_FAV_SB796.pdf

Uploaded by: Diane Arias

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 7, 2024

Senate Bill 796
Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established
Senate Finance Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 796 establishes the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program in the Department of Disabilities; requiring the Department to select a nonprofit training entity for participation in the Program; and establishing the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program Fund as a special, nonlapsing fund.

Service animals play a crucial role in preserving the independence of individuals with disabilities. Their trained assistance is not only life-saving but also provides essential support in various situations. Specifically, for individuals with visual impairments, these animals serve as guides, ensuring their safety by navigating them and preventing accidents with oncoming traffic. Moreover, service animals are capable of alerting individuals to their medical needs. For those dealing with conditions like diabetes or seizures, service animals undergo training to notify their handlers of any health changes. This allows the individuals to take necessary actions, such as administering insulin or finding a safe position during a seizure. Statistics reveal that service dogs are utilized for mental/psychiatric support (45%), medical condition alerts (34%), and mobility assistance (19%).¹ Recognizing the valuable role of service animals, there is a need to explore opportunities for more individuals to access these supports within the state.

The MCC supports initiatives that enhance the lives of individuals with disabilities, firmly believing that this bill will significantly contribute to achieving greater equity for this underserved population.

¹[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10670951/#:~:text=Two%20hundred%20and%20four%20individuals%20teamed%20with%20a%20service%20dog,%2C%20or%20mobility%20\(19%25\).](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10670951/#:~:text=Two%20hundred%20and%20four%20individuals%20teamed%20with%20a%20service%20dog,%2C%20or%20mobility%20(19%25).)

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **SB 796**.

Thank you for your consideration.

SB 796 Senator Simonaire_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV

BRYAN W. SIMONAIRE
Legislative District 31
Anne Arundel County

Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Written Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 796

Madam Chair and members of the Finance Committee, I am here to introduce and voice my support for Senate Bill 796 – *Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established*.

Senate Bill 796 would establish the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program within the Department of Disabilities, requiring the Department to select a nonprofit training entity for participation in the Program. It additionally would create the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program Fund as a special, non-lapsing fund.

SB 796 Sponsor Amendment-793926.pdf

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV



SB0796/793926/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

05 MAR 24
12:53:34

BY: Senator Simonaire
(To be offered in the Finance Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 796
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, strike in their entirety lines 13 through 17, inclusive.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 3, strike in their entirety lines 5 through 12, inclusive; and strike beginning with “HAS” in line 18 down through “TITLE” in line 19 and substitute “MEANS AN INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY, AS DEFINED IN THE FEDERAL AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12102”.

SB 796 Sponsor Amendment-893624.pdf

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV



SB0796/893624/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

06 MAR 24
12:31:52

BY: Senator Simonaire
(To be offered in the Finance Committee)

AMENDMENT TO SENATE BILL 796

(First Reading File Bill)

On page 6, strike beginning with “HAS” in line 13 down through “PROPERTY;” in line 14 and substitute “PRESENTS A DIRECT THREAT TO OTHERS, AS DEFINED BY THE FEDERAL AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT;”; and in line 15, strike “DANGER” and substitute “DIRECT THREAT”.

SB796.Council.Suppot.pdf

Uploaded by: Rachel London

Position: FAV



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Finance Committee

March 7, 2024

SB 796: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Establishment

Position: Support with Sponsor Amendments

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council), a statewide public policy organization led by people with developmental disabilities and their families, creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to lead the lives they want with the support they need. SB796 is another way to make sure that happens.

Service animals can play an important role in the lives of people with disabilities, especially children – eliminating barriers, creating opportunities, and promoting independence. Service animals are different from therapy animals or support animals because they are trained differently, perform different kinds of tasks, and have access to public places at different levels.

A service animal is “any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.”¹ For example, a service animal may safely guide a person who is blind or deaf; alert others to medical emergencies, like seizures, or pull a wheelchair.

It is costly to provide the training and support necessary for service animals and for the people that need them – many of whom have developmental disabilities. As such, the Council strongly supports the establishment of the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program, and supports the following amendments offered by the Sponsor to ensure all people who need service animals are eligible for the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program:

- Page 3, lines 18-19: (C) “ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUAL” MEANS **A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY AS DEFINED IN THE FEDERAL AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990, 42 U.S.C §12102.**
- Page 6, lines 7-20: §7-1105: (A) A NONPROFIT TRAINING ENTITY MAY DISQUALIFY A PROGRAM PARTICIPANT FROM PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM IF THE NONPROFIT TRAINING ENTITY DETERMINES THAT THE PROGRAM PARTICIPANT’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROGRAM: (1) PRESENTS A DANGER TO THE PROGRAM PARTICIPANT’S MENTAL OR PHYSICAL WELL-BEING; **(2) HAS CAUSED OR MAY POTENTIALLY CAUSE HARM IS A DIRECT THREAT TO OTHERS AS DEFINED BY THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT, AN ANIMAL, OR PROPERTY;** (3) PRESENTS **A DANGER DIRECT THREAT TO THE MENTAL OR PHYSICAL WELL-BEING OF THE SERVICE ANIMAL;** OR....

Contact: Rachel London, Executive Director: RLondon@md-council.org

¹ 28 C.F.R. §35.104; 28 C.F.R. §36.104.

SB796 dog test.pdf

Uploaded by: Ronza Othman

Position: FAV

Favorable SB796: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established

Date: March 7, 2024

From: National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

15 Charles Plaza, #3002, Baltimore, MD 21201

president@nfbmd.org

To: Senate Finance Committee

Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the members of the Senate Finance Committee to support SB796.

SB796 will create the service animal program for people with disabilities and charge the Department of Disabilities with the administration of the program. The Department of Disabilities is the appropriate entity to administer this program because of its knowledge of persons with disabilities.

Service animals must undergo at least a year of training to see if they are suitable for this type of work. A guide dog must be matched with a blind person. Then the blind person and the dog must go through at least a month of training to ensure compatibility and safety of both the person and the dog. Consequently, there can be a long period of time that blind people must wait to get a service animal trained by a specialized school. Blind people have been known to wait as long as two years to get their guide dog. There are currently no guide dog schools in Maryland. Blind people are forced to go to other states. This bill is important because it will create more opportunities for blind people to get a dog, by issuing a grant to a guide dog school. Trainers of the blind person and the dog will have a greater opportunity for work in the community where they live.

Please vote in favor of SB796. Give blind persons the opportunity to travel, work, and enjoy all aspects of community life.

SB796-Testimony from The Arc Maryland.pdf

Uploaded by: Sharon Dols

Position: FWA



The Arc Maryland
8601 Robert Fulton Drive, Suite 140
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T 410.571.9320
www.thearcmd.org

SB796: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program- Established
Sponsors: Senators Simonaire, King, Elfreth, and Carozza

Finance Committee
1:00 PM - East Miller Senate Building, Room 3, Annapolis, MD

Position: Support with Amendments

The Arc Maryland is a statewide disability advocacy organization that is dedicated to the preserving the rights, and improving the quality of life, of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We are pleased to support SB796, with amendments, which establishes the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program. Over 61 million people in the United States are living with disabilities. **Less than one percent are teamed with service dogs.** Service dogs, specifically trained to perform disability-related tasks, have long been known to provide invaluable support and assistance to individuals with disabilities. These specially trained animals are not only loyal companions, but they enable their handlers to live, work, and attend school more independently and confidently in their daily lives.

Examples of the work of a service dog who has undergone extensive training to perform tasks for an individual with a disability include:

- Medical Alerts: Detect an oncoming seizure in a person with epilepsy or low blood sugar levels in Diabetics
- Mobility: Help a blind person navigate around obstacles or pull a wheelchair
- Hearing Alerts: Alert someone is ringing the door bell
- Autism Support: Provide sensory stimulation & reduce anxiety

Assistance Dogs International (ADI), an organization that accredits service dog organizations in the United States, provides annual statistics on service dog teams from their accredited organizations. The amount of time to educate a service dog from an ADI-accredited organization is typically a minimum of 15 months. The cost of breeding, raising, training, and educating the individual who will be teamed with the service dog on how to work together, and ongoing lifetime support for the ADI-accredited service dog team can cost a family 10s of thousands of dollars. Due to the costs involved, people with limited means (which includes many people with disabilities) are often shut out of the possibility of obtaining a service dog. Those who have acceptable credit may be able to borrow from a bank to obtain the funds needed, but must pay these loans back from limited income.

In addition to the initial costs of attaining the service dog, owners spend about \$2,100 per year to care for their service dogs. These costs can include veterinary care, dog food, heartworm and flea preventatives, pet insurance, and more.

While there are some organizations that offer grants and scholarships to help individuals cover the costs and other organizations such as Canine Companions for Independence, Canines for Disabled Kids, and Assistance Dogs United, these resources are limited.

■ In 2023, NIH- from the National Library of Medicine, performed a study on the benefits of being teamed with a service dog for individuals living with visible and invisible disabilities. 204 individuals teamed with a service dog met the inclusion criteria for the study.

The study showed overwhelmingly, respondents agreed or strongly agreed to **benefits of emotional connection (96%), community participation (97%), physical activity (96%), psychological wellbeing (98%), quality of life (97%), a reduction in prescribed medications (78%), and a decrease in paid or unpaid assistance hours (83%), which extend beyond their primary disability need.** It is clear that many others may benefit from being teamed with a service dog. Service dogs, when indicated, may benefit individuals living with disabilities by meeting primary and secondary needs that support independence. Service dogs are broadly helpful across all ages, genders, races, and ethnicities, and are equally beneficial for individuals living with mental–psychiatric and physical disabilities. **Given the history of service dogs and the benefits of those teamed with service dogs reported in this study, it is incumbent upon society to support its social contract with individuals with disabilities by making this proven support more readily available.**

■ Also a 2019 study, led by the Purdue University’s College of Veterinary Medicine, shows how **service dogs can have measurable positive effects on the health and wellbeing of individuals with physical disabilities.** The study, which was published in *Disability and Rehabilitation* and funded by Elanco, was led by Kerri Rodriguez and Maggie O’Haire from the Center for the Human-Animal Bond.

The study recruited 154 individuals from the databases of national service dog provider, Canine Assistants, to participate in a survey. A total of 97 individuals had a service dog from Canine Assistants while 57 were on a waiting list to receive one.

Rodriguez and O’Haire said the findings help shed light on how service dogs may impact their handler in ways that extend beyond what they are directly trained for. “Our findings are important because they empirically validate the numerous anecdotal reports from individuals with service dogs that say that these dogs really have an impact on their life,” Rodriguez said. The results indicated that compared to those on the waitlist, individuals with a service dog exhibited significantly better psychosocial health including higher social, emotional, and work/school functioning. And the findings suggest that service dogs may have measurable effects on specific aspects of psychosocial health for individuals with physical disabilities or chronic conditions.

The amendments we propose have been shared with the Sponsor and we believe represent bill strengthening components:

- Page 3, lines 18-19: (C) “ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUAL” means a person with a disability as defined in the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C&12102.
- Page 6, lines 7-20: &7-1105: (A) A Nonprofit Training Entity may disqualify a program participant from participating in the program in the Nonprofit Training Entity determines that the program participant’s involvement n the program: (1) presents a danger to the program participant’s mental or physical well-being; (2) ~~has caused or may potentially~~

~~cause harm~~ is a direct threat to others as defined by the Americans With Disabilities Act, ~~an animal, or property~~; (3) presents a ~~danger~~ direct threat to the mental or physical well-being of the service animal; Or...

Acquiring a service dog can be highly beneficial for people living with disabilities. Not only are these highly-trained service dogs able to help their handlers with physical tasks, but they also offer increased independence, as well as improvements in social relationships, self-esteem, and overall life satisfaction. Many people even report a decrease in anxiety, stress, and loneliness. Trained service dogs can assist with practical, everyday tasks to help a person with a disability live, learn, work, and play with safety and independence.

In closing, we ask the committee for a favorable report on SB796.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Dols
Deputy Executive Director
sdols@thearcmd.org

ⁱ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10670951/#B3-healthcare-11-02987>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10670951/#B3-healthcare-11-02987>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/releases/2019/Q1/service-dogs-benefit-the%20well-being-of-their-handlers,-research-shows.html>