



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

January 15, 2025

Senate Bill 157
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 157 establishes the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program in the Department of Disabilities to refer eligible individuals to certain training entities, provide additional funding mechanisms to assist eligible individuals, and encourage participants to reach out to other individuals who could benefit from the Program; requiring the Department to select a nonprofit training entity for participation in the Program; and establishing the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program Fund to pay a participating nonprofit training entity.

Service animals are indispensable in supporting the independence and well-being of individuals with disabilities. These highly trained animals provide critical assistance, often serving as lifelines in a variety of situations. For individuals with visual impairments, service animals act as guides, ensuring their safety by navigating obstacles and preventing accidents, such as collisions with oncoming traffic. Beyond navigation, service animals are trained to recognize and alert their handlers to medical needs. For example, they can detect changes in blood sugar levels for individuals with diabetes or sense the onset of a seizure, enabling their handlers to take life-saving actions like administering insulin or finding a safe position.

Statistics highlight the broad scope of support service animals provide: 45% assist with mental or psychiatric needs, 34% alert to medical conditions, and 19% provide mobility assistance.¹ These numbers underscore the invaluable role of service animals in enhancing the quality of life for those with disabilities. Recognizing the profound impact of service animals, it is crucial to expand opportunities for individuals to access these essential supports within the state. The

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).)

MCC strongly supports initiatives that enhance the lives of individuals with disabilities, believing that this legislation will contribute significantly to achieving greater equity and independence for this underserved population.

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **SB 157**.

Thank you for your consideration.