



## **SB 157: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program - Established**

### **Testimony of the Maryland Independent Living Network**

#### **SUPPORT**

Senate Finance Committee, January 15, 2025

The Maryland Independent Living Network is a coalition of the Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council and the seven Maryland-based Centers for Independent Living (CIL). CILs are created by federal law. CILs work to enhance the civil rights and quality of services for people with disabilities. There are seven CILs located throughout Maryland, operated by and for people with disabilities. CILs provide Information and Referral, Advocacy, Peer Support, Independent Living Skills training, and Transition Services to individuals with disabilities in their communities.

The Independent Living Network submits this written testimony in **support** of SB 157.

SB 157 establishes the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program in the Maryland Department of Disabilities. The Program would refer eligible individuals to training entities, provide funding mechanisms to assist eligible individuals, and encourage participants to reach out to other individuals who could benefit from the Program.

People with disabilities benefit from service animals. In particular, children with disabilities benefit from service animals. Service animals perform specific tasks for people with disabilities and have access to public places. Service animals are not therapy animals or support animals which may not perform specific tasks and are not permitted access to public places.

Service animals benefit any individual with a disability. However, the cost of training service animals is a barrier and expanded access to training programs is needed.

The Maryland Independent Living Network supports the establishment of the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program in the Maryland Department of Disabilities. The Maryland Independent Living Network believes the Disability Service Animal Program will allow people with disabilities to live independently in the community of their choice.

The Maryland Independent Living Network appreciates the consideration of these comments.

The Maryland Independent Living Network strongly **supports** SB 157 and urges a **favorable** report.

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