

SB0157.Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Ande Kolp

Position: FAV



The Arc Maryland
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SB0157: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program- Established Sponsors:
Senators Simonaire, Carozza, Guzzone

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 SB0157, 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.

ii 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.**

iii 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.

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 SB0157.

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>

MD Blind and Deaf Service Animal Program Legislati

Uploaded by: Bryan Williams

Position: FAV

I am writing to advocate for SB 157, the Maryland Blind and Deaf Service Animal Program, on behalf of Dogs for Better Lives (DBL). DBL is committed to enhancing the lives of individuals through the placement of highly trained Service Dogs, and we firmly believe that SB 157 is instrumental in expanding funding and accessibility for members of the deaf and hard of hearing community.

An increase in the available funding for these transformative Hearing Service Dogs will greatly augment DBL's ability to train and place more hearing dogs in Maryland. Testimonials from our Maryland-based clients, like the one below, underscore the invaluable independence and safety these dogs provide:

“I felt even more drawn to a Hearing Service Dog after I went from being hard of hearing to complete and sudden deafness a few years back. It was incredibly scary, and I knew I needed a backup in case I lost my hearing or went deaf again. After a lot of research, I applied through Dogs for Better lives. My Hearing Dog 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.”

In Maryland, we see a significant demand for Hearing Service Dogs. DBL has several individuals from Maryland currently on our organization's waitlist and multiple active Hearing Dog Teams.

As the oldest provider of professionally trained Hearing Service Dogs in the United States, we have placed upwards of 1,700 dogs nationally since 1977. Today, our Hearing Dog program currently has nearly two dozen deserving individuals on our wait list. The high demand for Hearing Service Dogs means that there are wait times up to 3 years to receive a dog. This means a significant portion of individuals in Maryland and across the nation who need Hearing Service Dogs for safety and independence do not have access to them. Increased funding can help close that time gap and allow for more Hearing Service Dogs to be placed each year.

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 investment into a future Service Dog is significant. It takes approximately 6 months to professionally train a Hearing Service Dog, and that time is even longer for purpose-bred dogs who live with Puppy Raisers until they are 14 months of age. In addition to the funding and time required to train and place a Hearing Service Dog, one must not overlook the lifetime commitment involved. DBL provides ongoing support and client follow-ups throughout the life of the team to ensure the Hearing Service Dogs are meeting each individual client's needs.

Studies such as the 2021 PEDRO study conducted in the UK have demonstrated that recipients of Hearing Service Dogs experience increased wellbeing and reduced dependency on others, along with decreased feelings of isolation and fear both at home and in public.

Establishing 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, providing them not only with companionship but also with essential independence and safety measures.

In conclusion, we urge the Health and Governance Committee to support this crucial initiative during the upcoming hearing on April 2. SB 157 will expand access and funding for Hearing Service Dogs, enabling more individuals in Maryland to benefit from these life-changing dogs.

IL Written Testimony - SB 157 - Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Chris Kelter

Position: FAV



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.

Contact Information:

Chris Kelter, Executive Director
Accessible Resources for Independence
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Danielle Bustos, MDYLF Coordinator
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Maryland Catholic Conference_FAV_SB157.pdf

Uploaded by: Diane Arias

Position: FAV



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.

DRM FAV 2025 SB 157 - Maryland Disability Service

Uploaded by: Gabriel Rubinstein

Position: FAV

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
SENATE BILL 157
Maryland Disability Service Animal Program - Established
January 15, 2025
Position: SUPPORT

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 157, which seeks to establish the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program and Fund within the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD). This legislation represents a critical step toward ensuring that individuals with disabilities in Maryland have equitable access to highly trained service animals, which are indispensable for promoting independence, safety, and quality of life.

Service animals are crucial in removing barriers for people with disabilities by offering specialized support tailored to their needs. These animals are trained to perform tasks such as medical alerts, mobility assistance, and sensory regulation, enabling individuals with disabilities to live, work, and engage in their communities more independently.

Despite the demonstrated benefits of service animals, access to these critical supports remains limited due to high costs, placing this resource out of reach for many individuals with disabilities—particularly those with limited incomes. Senate Bill 157 addresses this inequity by creating a funding mechanism to assist eligible Marylanders in obtaining service animals and providing administrative oversight to ensure the program’s success.

The inclusion of amendments recommended by The Arc Maryland in last year’s iteration of this bill strengthens its framework. The use of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) definition of disability ensures alignment with federal standards, while provisions for nonprofit training entities establish clear guidelines for the selection and operation of program partners. These measures enhance the program’s accessibility and sustainability.

Research supports the transformative impact of service animals on the lives of individuals with disabilities. A 2023 study from the National Library of Medicine found that service animals improve emotional well-being,

community participation, and quality of life for their handlers with accompanying decreases in reliance on other state services.¹ Notably, 83% of respondents to the study reported a decrease in paid or unpaid assistance hours from state services.² By reducing reliance on other forms of assistance, service animals generate cost savings for healthcare systems and social services, providing both personal and societal benefits.

In closing, Senate Bill 157 is an important opportunity to advance equity and independence for Marylanders with disabilities. By supporting this legislation, the General Assembly can ensure that service animals are no longer an unattainable resource but a readily available tool for empowerment and inclusion. Thank you for your consideration of this critical bill.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report on SB 157. Please do not hesitate to contact me at GabrielR@DisabilityRightsMD.org, or by phone at 443-692-2483.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Gabriel Rubinstein
Gabriel H. Rubinstein, Esq.
Managing Attorney
Disability Rights Maryland

¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10670951/#B3-healthcare-11-02987>.

² *Id.*

SB 157 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 157

Madam Chair and members of the Finance Committee, I am here to introduce and voice my support for Senate Bill 157 – *Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established*.

Senate Bill 157 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.

SB157.Council.Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Rachel London

Position: FAV



**Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council**

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Finance Committee

January 15, 2025

SB 157: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Establishment

Position: **Support**

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. SB 157 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 appreciates the efforts by the Sponsor to ensure all people who need service animals are eligible for the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program.

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

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

SB 157 MWE Testimony SUPPORT.pdf

Uploaded by: Rev. Ray Raysor

Position: FAV



**Metropolitan
Washington Ear**

Committee: Senate Finance Committee

Bill Number: Senate Bill 157 – Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established

Hearing Date: January 15, 2025

Position: Support

Metropolitan Washington Ear, Inc. (MWE) located in Silver Spring, Maryland, is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization incorporated under the laws of the State of Maryland. MWE provides reading and information services, and independent living skills training for blind, visually impaired, and physically disabled people who cannot effectively read print, see plays, watch television programs and films, or view museum exhibits. Established in 1974, we've been providing quality services throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia for more than 50 years. As an organization that serves the disabled community and fights for access for our community, we **SUPPORT** SB 157.

SB 157 would establish the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program in the Department of Disabilities and require the Department to select a nonprofit training entity or entities to participate in the Program. This legislation also creates the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program Fund as a special, nonlapsing fund.

Service animals help people with disabilities live more independently and fulfilling lives. They can provide mobility assistance, help with vision and hearing, and offer mental health support. There are various types of service animals, many of those who we serve utilize a "blind and visually impaired service dog," otherwise known as a guide dog. This dog is specifically trained to assist individuals with blindness or severe visual impairment by guiding them around obstacles, alerting them to changes in terrain like stairs or curbs, and helping them navigate safely in public spaces.

Currently, across the country there is a backlog of service animals specifically, service dogs and it can take years to get a trained service dog. This is due to a shortage of volunteers to raise puppies before training begins. The establishment of this program and fund could help expedite access to a service dog, in which, for many in the disabled community is the way to independence.

For these reasons, MWE **supports SB 157** and **ask the committee for a favorable report**.

If we can provide any additional information, please contact Jocelyn I. Collins at jcollins@policypartners.net.

SB157_NFBMD dog testimony favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Ronza Othman

Position: FAV



Live the life you want.

Subject: Favorable SB157: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established

January 15, 2025

National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

15 Charles Plaza, #3002

Baltimore, MD 21201

President@nfbmd.org

Senate Finance Committee:

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge you to support SB157. This bill establishes a new program in the Maryland department of disabilities. This department is the appropriate place to house such a program because it will be able to administer the non-lapsing fund created in this bill. It will also be able to judge the merits of nonprofit entities requesting to do business in Maryland. The department is primarily responsible for coordinating disability policy for the state and establishing regulations and determining who is eligible for the program.

The Maryland department of disability is charged with improving the lives of Maryland's disabled citizens. The service animal program will make it possible for blind persons to have the opportunity to get a dog trained in Maryland. This will be less expensive for the individual in the long run.

The goal of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland is full integration of the blind into society. This bill will enable the blind to have more mobility by using the assistance of a guide dog. Please help us meet the goal of integration by voting in favor of SB157.

SB157_Wells dog testimony favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Ronza Othman

Position: FAV



Live the life you want.

Favorable SB157: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established

January 15, 2025

Danielle McCann
113 Wells Avenue
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To Senate Finance Committee:

My name is Danielle McCann. I am currently working my fifth guide dog, Cammie. Working with my dogs has been one of my life's blessings. While the white cane is an obstacle finder, guide dogs are trained to be obstacle avoiders. As someone who has lived and worked in the Baltimore area for five years now, the feeling of weaving around obstacles on the narrow sidewalks is a feeling of freedom that I can't describe.

Please give more blind people in Maryland the opportunity to experience smooth travel and the chance to gain confidence and freedom of movement. Vote in favor of SB157.