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**SB 157**

March 19, 2025

**TO:** Members of the House Health & Government Operations Committee

**FROM:** Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

**RE:** Senate Bill 157 - Maryland Disability Service Animal Program - Established

**POSITION: Support**

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 157 - Maryland Disability Service Animal Program - Established.

SB 157 would establish the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program under the Department of Disabilities to fund and facilitate the training and pairing of disability service animals for eligible participants with disabilities. This bill would also establish the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program Fund to allocate the necessary funds to eligible non-profit training entities to accomplish the purpose of the bill. A state-sanctioned disability service animal program will improve the supply and accessibility of medically necessary service animals for individuals living with disabilities in need of such support.

Service animals present many functional benefits to individuals living with disabilities including mobility assistance, medical alerts, seizure response, medication reminders, hearing assistance, autism support, and calming for individuals with PTSD. Furthermore, it was found that "in addition to the functional benefits of a service dog... their placement may also afford measurable psychosocial benefits to the daily lives of individuals with physical disabilities or chronic conditions,"<sup>i</sup> according to the research paper published in the Disability and Rehabilitation journal in 2019. The State of Maryland currently has in place both a Veterans' and Children's Service Animal Program; this legislation would simply make available to those with disabilities the same kind of referral service. While this bill does have a small fiscal impact, it requires that any nonprofit training entity selected to work with the program have its own resources and budget. Additionally, the program would allow the State to receive grants and donations - which might offset this minor fiscal impact.

For the reasons stated above, the BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB 157.

<sup>i</sup> Rodriguez, K. E., Bibbo, J., & O'Haire, M. E. (2019). The effects of service dogs on psychosocial health and wellbeing for individuals with physical disabilities or chronic conditions. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 42(10), 1350–1358.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2018.1524520>