



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.