

Favorable SB796: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established

Date: April 2, 2024

From: National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

15 Charles Plaza, #3002, Baltimore, MD 21201

president@nfbmd.org

To: House, Health, & Government Operations Committee

Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the members of the House, Health, & Government Operations Committee to support SB796.

SB796 will create the service animal program for people with disabilities and charge the Department of Disabilities with the administration of the program. The Department of Disabilities is the appropriate entity to administer this program because of its knowledge of persons with disabilities.

Service animals must undergo at least a year of training to see if they are suitable for this type of work. A guide dog must be matched with a blind person. Then the blind person and the dog must go through at least a month of training to ensure compatibility and safety of both the person and the dog. Consequently, there can be a long period of time that blind people must wait to get a service animal trained by a specialized school. Blind people have been known to wait as long as two years to get their guide dog. There are currently no guide dog schools in Maryland. Blind people are forced to go to other states. This bill is important because it will create more opportunities for blind people to get a dog, by issuing a grant to a guide dog school. Trainers of the blind person and the dog will have a greater opportunity for work in the community where they live.

Please vote in favor of SB796. Give blind persons the opportunity to travel, work, and enjoy all aspects of community life.