Connecticut General Assembly, 2016 Session

Raised Bill 35

Frequently Asked Questions

Does this bill only hurt guide dog users?

No, this bill affects all blind people. In addition to the many damaging effects that this bill will have upon the process of obtaining a guide dog, this bill proposes to institutionalize a misperception that blindness is a medical problem rather than a social problem. There is a misperception that blindness is a disease from which people suffer rather than a simple characteristic. The real problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight; it is the low expectations and misinformation associated with blindness in society. With the right training and opportunity, blind people can lead normal and productive lives.

Why is rehabilitation separate from the medical field?

While an eye condition is still being treated and the restoration of eyesight is still being actively and realistically pursued, that eye condition is an illness and falls within the domain of healthcare. Once the restoration of that person’s eyesight is no longer a realistic and active pursuit by medical treatment, a blind person can begin to move on with his or her life, and he or she transitions from medical treatment to blindness rehabilitation. An individual may properly be said to be “blind” or a “blind person” when he or she must employ enough alternative techniques in order to function efficiently that his or her pattern of daily living is substantially altered. Rehabilitation services include the provision of training in the alternative techniques used by blind people and the equipment to make independence and gainful employment possible. Some blind people choose to use guide dogs to navigate their environment, enabling them to pursue gainful employment. When vision is not functioning, it does not affect other body systems; it is a sensory issue, which is not an illness. Guide dogs and guide dog schools do not contribute to the restoration of eyesight or the management of any health condition.

Why will this bill hurt guide dog schools?

This bill will reduce the incentives of philanthropists and grant funding entities to give money to guide dog schools since the guide dog schools will already be promised funding from health insurance providers. Guide dog schools will become dependent upon the funding from the health insurance providers and will not be able to turn down unfit consumers. The schools will be forced to comply with accreditation standards set by other schools in a small niche industry, which also hurts their autonomy to serve the consumers.

Why will this bill reduce the quality of services offered by the guide dog industry?

Currently, only the trained professionals in the blindness field and the consumers who use guide dogs are involved in the decision-making processes; this bill will involve completely untrained professionals from the healthcare industry in these decision-making processes. Guide dog schools will not have the autonomy to make the decisions that will best suit the needs of the consumers.

Why are guide dogs different from assistance dogs such as seizure dogs or therapy dogs?

Some blind people choose to use guide dogs to navigate their environment, enabling them to pursue gainful employment. Guide dogs and guide dog schools do not contribute to the restoration of eyesight or the management of any health condition. In fact, potential guide dog puppies who demonstrate any tendency to do anything other than guide their users, such as those which display protective instincts, are dismissed from the guide dog schools. A contrasting example could be a service dog which is trained to smell a hormone that a person secretes before having a seizure and alert that person so that he or she can take a medication to prevent the seizure. That service dog is providing a medical service; however, a guide dog is specifically and exclusively a mobility tool like a long white cane.

Would it be unjust discrimination if guide dogs were removed from this bill?

No. This bill covers medical assistance dogs, which guide dogs are not. Guide dogs have been mistakenly classified in a category in which they have never belonged and will never belong.

How much does it cost a blind person to get a guide dog?

A blind person can get a guide dog absolutely free. One guide dog school charges some optional fees to offset the cost of lodging and meals while the handler is training with a new dog for a three-week period, but those fees are optional.

Do all blind people use guide dogs? Why or why not?

No. Some blind people choose a guide dog as a mobility tool. Others choose a white cane. Some blind people have not yet received adequate training and do not travel independently or do not use a mobility tool of any sort.