

**TESTIMONY OF DAVID McCUE
RAISED SENATE BILL 65
FEBRUARY 28, 2008**

Good afternoon Madam Chair, Mr. Chairman & Members of the Labor Committee.

My name is David McCue. I live in Wethersfield and work for the State Department of Administrative Services in Hartford. I am a member of Local 538 of Council 4 AFSCME.

I am legally blind and rely on guide dogs to get through the day. I am here today to speak in support of S. B. No. 65 (RAISED) AN ACT ALLOWING BLIND OR PHYSICALLY DISABLED STATE OR QUASI-PUBLIC EMPLOYEES TO USE ACCUMULATED SICK LEAVE FOR GUIDE DOG TRAINING.

Last year, my employer forced me to use vacation time for mandated guide dog training.

Fortunately, my union intervened and secured a stipulated agreement allowing me to first use my sick leave for such training.

But this negotiated agreement applies only to me.

That's why I commend you for raising Senate Bill 65. It's a good start to protecting all blind and disabled workers.

I strongly encourage you to consider expanding the language of Raise Bill Number 65 to include any blind or physically disabled resident of the State of Connecticut (public or private sector) who either has or obtains a job with a sick time benefit.

I have another suggestion as well. Sanctioned dog training is not a short process. I obtained my guide dog from Freedom Guide Dogs for the Blind in Cassville, New York.

Freedom is the only school in the northeast that does this in a 2 week period. Fidelco, located here in CT, requires 3 weeks. All the other schools are located out of state and require you to stay for a period of 4 to 6 weeks.

Therefore I encourage you to draft legislation that clearly allows blind or physically disabled employees to utilize or borrow sick leave as long as there is no documented abuse of such benefit, for a period not to exceed 30 days in a calendar year.

The purpose of a guide dog is to keep the handler safe, productive and free of harm. For an individual such as myself who has chosen to join and contribute to the

workforce, making the decision to obtain and use a dog is a major life changing event, like getting married or buying a home.

Without guide dog training, I would have continued to jeopardize my safety and my employment. Once I tripped and fell off the curb in front of the state office building on Capitol Avenue. An angel from heaven must have been watching over me that day as I was not injured.

Had I been hurt, the costs would have far exceeded using or borrowing sick time for the maximum six-week period assigned to guide dog training.

Thank you for listening to me and for raising this important legislation.

I will be glad to answer your questions.

I also have available documents detailing the events of my situation should you need them.

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