

February 16, 2015

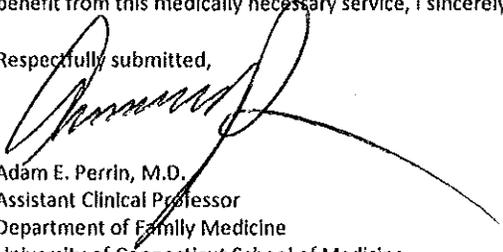
Dear Senator Bartolomeo and Members of the Committee on Insurance and Real Estate:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 234 "An Act Requiring Health Insurance Coverage For The Purchase Of Assistance Dogs". My understanding is that passage of this bill would specifically mandate provision of health insurance coverage for purchase of an assistance dog that is specially trained to assist blind, deaf or mobility impaired persons or persons with a disability that is other than physical including, but not limited to, anxiety disorders. This assistance dog shall be purchased from a non-profit organization that is established for the training of such dogs and is an accredited member of a professional association of assistance dog organizations. Coverage would be contingent on insured's treating health care provider certifying in writing that assistance dog is medically necessary. I am a health care provider with a disabled patient who happens to meet every one of these required elements.

I am a family physician who has the privilege of caring for the Helmedach family of Middlefield, CT (also my hometown). Roslyn Helmedach, age 16, carries the unfortunate diagnosis of Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS). EDS is a relatively rare genetic disorder of connective tissue with clinical manifestations that are dictated by subtype. Roslyn has the Hypermobility subtype which is characterized primarily by generalized joint hypermobility and severe musculoskeletal pain. Her joints are unstable and she experiences frequent joint dislocations and associated chronic joint pain. It is not uncommon to develop premature osteoarthritis in EDS – Hypermobility subtype. Roslyn has the misfortune of having the additional ailment of autonomic dysfunction in the form of Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS) which can be part of EDS. This entity is characterized by sudden onset of rapid heart rate which results in episodes of fainting. These episodes are unpredictable and can result in significant injury from the fall especially in an individual who already has weakened connective tissue. All told, having EDS with POTS makes for an extraordinarily challenging existence, especially for a highly intelligent 16 year old girl, and an adversely impacted quality of life. Roslyn is severely disabled and often immobilized to the degree that she is wheelchair bound. Special arrangements have been made for her schooling as she is frequently unable to attend classes in person. The resultant isolation and chronic pain has left her depressed and frequently anxious as she considers what her future holds. Her guardians live in constant fear of Roslyn falling and severely injuring herself and hence are hesitant to ever leave her alone.

This is where an assistance dog comes in. When considering the overall functional impact and associated risks of having EDS with POTS including limited mobility, reduced stamina, muscular weakness, fatigue, unstable joints, chronic pain, balance issues, and heightened emotions with depression/anxiety, having a service dog becomes a medical necessity. A well-trained assistance dog would be exceedingly beneficial to Roslyn's safety and well-being and would serve as an essential adjunct in helping provide her with a reasonably normal life. Not only would it provide assistance with her many physical limitations but it would be able to initiate call to emergency services in the event of a fainting episode/fall. Perhaps more importantly the dog would provide companionship and a much needed emotional boost. Roslyn has fortunately been granted an assistance dog through the established non-profit organization Educated Canines Assisting with Disabilities (ECAD). The out of pocket expense for such an animal runs in the tens of thousands. For Roslyn's sake and the sake of many others with disabilities who would benefit from this medically necessary service, I sincerely hope you are able to pass this bill into law. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,



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