

Members of the Committee:

STATEMENT

I am here today to support Proposed Bill No. 234 - An Act Requiring Insurance Companies to Provide Coverage for the Cost of Assistance Dogs. Assistance or Service Dogs guide the mobility impaired, hearing impaired, blind or visually impaired, and other people with disabilities. Service dogs provide a meaningful service to the mentally ill as well: Anxiety and depression can be disabling conditions. Children with PANDAS (Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorder Associated with Streptococcal Infection), PANS (Pediatric Acute-onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome) have multiple psychiatric components such as OCD, drastic mood swings, temper tantrums, separation anxiety, and other mental illness diagnoses. These conditions are the result of other debilitating medical issues: In PANDAS, it is triggered by a Strep or Scarlet Fever infection, and PANS can be triggered by other diseases such as Lyme, Walking Pneumonia, Flu, Chickenpox, and other bacterial infections and toxins. Many bodily systems can be impacted by infections as you know. These can affect your Central Nervous System....some people experience vertigo, nausea, gait and balance problems as a result of damage from their illness. There are instances where you will be able to "see" a person's disability, and there are cases where you will not be able to "see" a person's disability. These are all important to think about when considering whether or not an insurance company should provide coverage for a service dog.

Service dogs are specifically trained to assist the person they are matched with. They are trained for a specific physical and / or mental disability. These loyal and working dogs can turn light switches on and off, provide stability and a soft landing for a person who faints or has seizures, provide comfort and

emotional support for those in need. Some dogs are trained to be Diabetic Alert service dogs. A person may need a wheelchair, cane, or other device to assist them in being independent in their daily living activities. Very often a family has already gone through their financial resources since there are items and services insurance companies do not cover. People in need of service dogs have taken to Fund-raising efforts in order to be able to afford a service dog.

Lori Helmedach reached out to her State Senator, Bartolomeo so that she can get help for her daughter, Roslyn. I am sure you know a bit about Roslyn...She is 16, has multiple disabilities; Ehlers Danlos Syndrome (EDS), POTS = Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia which can and has caused her to pass out when standing, anxiety, and several other medical issues. I wholeheartedly support Lori's efforts and understand the need and how financially overwhelming it can be to get the help your sick child needs to be able to enable them to lead a better quality of life and assist them in their daily activities. I have a 16 year old daughter with a debilitating chronic illness or illnesses, rather. She, like Roslyn, has POTS which happens when the autonomic nervous system is deregulated....this can affect blood pressure, heart rate, digestion, swallowing, etc. - We try very hard not to leave our daughter at home alone. She has numerous serious and complicated medical conditions, and due to her current medical status, she is on home-bound instruction. Korey also has Lyme Disease and PANS (which was noted above). Her illnesses have impacted her physically, emotional, and mentally. She has experienced a significant decline in her cognitive abilities. To someone who does not know about Korey, she might look just fine, but she is fighting several battles on the inside and struggles to get through each day.

Roslyn and Korey, and many other teens, children, and adults with complex medical conditions and disabilities need help to accomplish what so many take for granted through the course of an average day in their lives. I encourage you to please take the time to learn about how service dogs can be of assistance and

help people be more independent: There are many non-profit service dog organizations....you can access their websites and learn what these incredible dogs can do for people in need. Please support Proposed Bill No. 234 which will require insurance companies to provide coverage for the cost of service (assistance) dogs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Andrea Herlth

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I am hoping to be present and read this at the Hearing on Tuesday; however, if there is incimate weather or if my daughter is not well that day, please read this at the Hearing. Thank you!