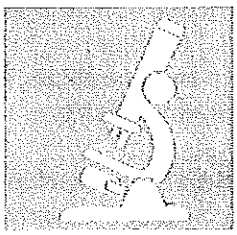
# DYSAUTONOMIA INTERNATIONAL



AWARENESS ADVOCACY ADVANCEMENT

New York Regional Office (Main)
67 Woodlawn Avenue
East Moriches, NY 11940

Washington, D.C. Regional Office
6151 Executive Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20852-3901

February 17, 2015

Insurance and Real Estate Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
State Capitol
Hartford, CT 06106

**Re: SB 234 Public Hearing Testimony**

Dear Legislators,

Dysautonomia International is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that advocates on behalf of people living disorders of the autonomic nervous system, collectively known as "dysautonomia." We are writing in support of SB 234, a bill to require insurance coverage for service dogs. We have several hundred members and volunteers that reside in the state of Connecticut, but given the short notice and inclement weather, it is unlikely that any of our members will be able to attend today's hearing on SB 234. We request that this testimony be read into the record of the public hearing.

People with dysautonomia have a very hard time standing due to abnormalities in their blood pressure and heart rate. Even with optimized medications and lifestyle changes, dysautonomia patients often experience syncope (the medical term for fainting) or experience what doctors call pre-syncope, a sensation of lightheadedness, loss of vision, chest pain, and feeling like all of your blood has drained to your feet, which often occurs just before a person faints. Syncope and pre-syncope can be accompanied by a loss of muscle tone, which can result in abrupt falls. For some dysautonomia patients, syncope can occur several times per day, which results in a restriction in their mobility, fear of falling, and injuries due to repeated falls. Syncope related falls can result in broken bones, internal bleeding, and in some cases, death.

Amazingly, service dogs can be trained to identify when syncope is about to happen. The dog can be trained to notify the patient to sit or lay down, to prevent serious injury from a fall that can result from the syncopal episode. Dysautonomia patients who have been fortunate enough to obtain service dogs report a dramatic improvement in their quality-of-life, their mobility, and their ability to attend school and work, and engage in social activities.

Keeping dysautonomia patients active and engaged in society will reduce healthcare costs in the long run. Dysautonomia patients who are injured by repeated falls from fainting or those become bedridden are heavy users of our limited healthcare resources. These costs can be avoided by provision of trained service dogs in medically appropriate cases.

The high cost of trained service dogs prevents access to this mode of therapy for many patients. We encourage the Legislature to support SB 234, requiring insurance coverage for service dogs in medically appropriate situations, just as insurers cover wheelchairs, walkers and other tools that give patients increased independence, mobility and improved safety.

As you deliberate this matter, please feel free to contact me if you would like addition information on dysautonomia and how service dogs can benefit dysautonomia patients (lstiles@dysautonomiainternational.org).

Respectfully,

Lauren Stiles, Esq.
President, Dysautonomia International