

Dear Legislator,

I urge you to **oppose Senate Bill 234 as written**. I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, the statewide organization of blind consumers. We have learned about the detrimental effects that this bill could have on the guide dog industry. While we appreciate that some well-meaning people may have authored this language in order to help us, it has serious potential to do a lot more harm than good. Since we are not experts on other types of assistance dogs, we will not speak for the consumers of other types of assistance dogs; by the same logic, we are the only ones that can speak for ourselves when it comes to guide dogs.

SB 234 will shift the acquisition of guide dogs to being governed by a medical model. Medical service providers will then be making decisions about what types of rehabilitation services we need, which they are absolutely not trained to do. Health insurance and medical personnel need to stay out of a process that is the domain of education and rehabilitation professionals.

SB 234 requires that guide dogs come from an "accredited, non-profit organization", but common standards do not yet exist. ADI, (Assistance Dogs International), attempts to do this, but it falls short, especially in the areas of consumer participation and consumer advocacy and rights.

SB 234 takes autonomy away from guide dog schools. By telling them that they must affiliate with other schools, they lose their independence and the freedom to innovate as they serve their consumers.

SB 234 will take us away from the philanthropic funding model, which is already working quite well, and stack yet another cost onto health insurance. The system isn't broken, and I don't want the Connecticut General Assembly to try to fix it. There is usually no cost of obtaining a guide dog for blind people, some guide dog schools only suggest a donation.

Right now, guide dogs are funded through charitable donations. No doctor is required to say I need one, and no unit of government says where I must go to get a dog. Please do not let SB 234 change that! Please vote against Senate Bill 234 until the language about guide dogs has been removed!

I have been a guide dog user for nine years now and plan on continuing to do so for the rest of my life. The system as it stands is affordable and does not need to change.

Sincerely,

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