



## State of Connecticut

### SENATE

#### SENATOR DANTÉ BARTOLOMEO

*Thirteenth District*

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 234  
Insurance and Real Estate Committee Public Hearing  
February 17, 2015**

Chairman Crisco, Chairman Megna, and members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee:

I am here to speak in support of Senate Bill 234, An Act Requiring Health Insurance Coverage for the Purchase of Assistance Dogs. This bill is the result of many months of trying to find help for constituents of mine whose minor daughter is in need of an assistance dog. Despite our efforts, we have found no agency, program or insurance that would cover this costly medical aid.

My constituents' sixteen-year-old daughter has multiple medical conditions that cause her to lose consciousness, fall, dislocate joints, and have seizures. As a result, she copes with extreme anxiety. After learning that an assistance dog trained in alerting and attending to medical emergencies, providing much-needed balance, and even pulling a wheelchair, could make their child's daily life more manageable, my constituents began looking into the process of acquiring such a dog. They report that insurance companies may cover the cost of such medical aids as lifts, wheelchairs, and other equipment that makes a disabled individual more autonomous. But they—and I—were surprised to find that there was no such coverage for this type of dog.

Assistance dogs range in type from guide dogs for those who are blind, hearing dogs for those who are hearing impaired or deaf, to service dogs for those with physical disabilities, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (often used by veterans), or a combination thereof. While the cost of such dogs and their training varies greatly depending upon the tasks they perform and the agency from which they are provided, it is my contention that medical insurance should cover this medical aid.

I believe it is important to note that my constituents will not benefit from this bill, because thanks to local fundraising efforts, they were able to purchase their first assistance dog and finance the upcoming training sessions. But both are EMTs and volunteer firefighters and it is within their nature to help others, especially given the level of support that they have received from their community, and they have been actively supporting this bill so that others will benefit.

I respectfully defer to this committee's experience and expertise to determine the framework under which such a benefit should exist. But, I do hold the belief that the individuals served by these dogs would require less in emergency care claims resulting from falls, less in costly in-home personal healthcare to manage daily living skills, and less treatment for extreme anxiety. An assistance dog is a long-term, reliable investment.

Therefore, I urge you to give favorable consideration to Senate Bill 234. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony this afternoon.