

Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5288

AN ACT ALIGNING STATE LAW WITH FEDERAL LAW CONCERNING

Title: SERVICE ANIMALS.

Vote Date: 3/14/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/27/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill wants to match the state definition of "service animal" with the federal definition. The American Disabilities Act defines service animals as individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability. To facilitate educating the public about aligning the definition, the bill wishes to use available appropriations to create educational tools on the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities website. The bill specifically wants tools to distinguish between service, emotional support, and therapy animals. In addition, the bill grants greater accommodations to full-time state or quasi-public agency workers who have a disability, including the allowance of 20 days of accumulated paid sick leave to attend service animal training programs.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Tanya Hughes, Executive Director, Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities:

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) is in favor of this bill, as it would expand protections for people that use service animals to include mental, intellectual, learning, and physical disabilities. The Commission believes it is important to acknowledge that service animals can assist with detecting changes in blood sugar, seizures, allergens, and psychiatric episodes, in addition to the more commonly known use of visual and mobility disabilities. CHRO feels that this is a timely bill as Connecticut faces an issue of disability discrimination with 809 claims made in the last fiscal year. The Commission adds the importance of including the definition of "service animal" in state statute because of its wider protections, instead of the federal law which can be amended.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Linda Blick, President, Tails of Hope Foundation Inc.: The foundation is in support of this bill as they believe the service dog field is unregulated and has resulted in "fake service dogs." Some websites allow people to fake the title of a "service dog" through the purchase of fraudulent credentials for a small fee. The foundation advocates for valid service dogs who help people and veterans with disabilities in their access to transportation and doctor appointments. Stories about service dogs helping people in emergency crises and everyday life gained the foundation's support for increased legislation in this field.

Additional Testimony

Brief testimonies are in support of the broader workplace protections granted to people with disabilities who use service animals. Two testimonies note the importance of service animals for veterans with disabilities in their everyday lives.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

No sources of opposition Colleen Lucey

Reported by: Colleen Lucey

Date: 3/21/24