



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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Legislative & Public Awareness Committee Minutes for April 30, 2024

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

William Del Toro Vargas (P)	Julia Grant Barol (P)	Lynn Heitz (P)
Michele Leahy (NP)	Paul Fogle (NP)	Joan Goodman (P)
Michelle Mitchell (P)	Jessica Keogh (P)	Passle Helminski (P)

OVR Staff Present: Chris Harbert

PaRC Staff Present: Chris Todd

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA: None

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES:

MOTION was made by Ms. Jessica Keogh to approve today's agenda and past meeting minutes. Ms. Julia Barol seconded the motion. All were in favor.

AGENDA ITEMS:

Discussion of Potential Service Dog Language for Position Papers Adjourn

- Members reviewed a draft of the Service Dog Law language that was discussed and requested during the previous Committee meeting held on April 24, 2024. Draft language included the following:
 - Service Dog Laws**
Action Requested:
 - A Service Dog is any dog which has been or is in the process of being trained as a guide dog, signal dog or has been trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability.
 - The PaRC understands that Service Dogs are critical toward the attaining and maintaining of independent living especially in regard to employment and recommends that laws prohibiting any interference with Service Dogs be re-introduced and enforced.

- *Harassment of or interfering with a Service Dog is detrimental to people with disabilities especially regarding their access to employment. The PaRC supports the education of people in our communities about the importance of Service Dogs and the harm interference with Service Dogs poses to people with disabilities.*
 - *Additionally, the Council supports legislation that would strengthen protections for Service Dogs*
- Members inquired about including the term 'service animals' within the draft language. Members explained that emotional support animals are included within Federal Law.
- Ms. Passle Helminski explained that Federal Law has been changed and only dogs are allowed on flights. Federal Law and some other states do not recognize emotional support dogs as service dogs.
- Ms. Jessica Keogh and Mr. William Del Toro Vargas explained there should be a revision to include the term 'trained emotional support animals' as they are used for employment.
- Ms. Lynn Heitz and Ms. Passle Helminski explained that they have concerns with including emotional support animals within the draft language. Reported that emotional support animals have gone after their service dogs. There is no universal certification for service animals, certifications for emotional support animals can easily be obtained online without training, certified service dogs have been trained at a school for service dogs or guide dogs and come with a formal identification.
- Mr. Del Toro Vargas suggested including language that specifies 'fully trained emotional support animals that do not interfere with service dogs or others.' Explained that he understands the concerns with untrained animals and also understands that there may be many more citizens advocating Legislators for emotional support dogs. Suggested streamlining language for service dogs once there is Legislation being introduced.
- Ms. Jessica Keogh suggested adding language to state 'as it obtains to employment' for both service dogs and emotional support dogs.
- Ms. Helminski explained that she would like to have language that supports trained service dogs that are trained to help people with specific disabilities. Some trained service dogs do help people diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which could be considered emotional support, but they are trained to help with specific tasks as are other service dogs trained to help with specific disabilities.
- Mr. Del Toro Vargas suggested including two separate sections one for service dogs and developing a second section educating about emotional support animals.
- Ms. Michelle Mitchell suggested including language that states specifically trained to meet a specific service disability need and leave out the terms service dog and emotional support animal. Just include language that would specify dogs or animals for those tasks that meets those needs for individuals with disabilities as it relates to employment. This would support potential Service Dog Laws as it would support language that would be included within the Legislation.
- Members agreed there is not a training program for emotional support animals.

Ms. Mitchell explained that one could argue there are not training program requirements for a service dog either as they can be trained individually. Ms. Helminski explained that she has trained her service dogs for 3 levels of obedience and had to have a Good Citizen Test completed for each service dog prior to going into public. If someone's dog acts up, they are allowed to ask if this is a trained service dog and what tasks is the trained service dog trained to do. Explained the law states, if you cannot control your dog, you may be asked to leave and must get in writing that your dog has been trained before being allowed to return. Ms. Mitchell explained that the language should state that we wholeheartedly support animals that are specifically trained to support a specific disability related need to access employment and independent living.

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to approve the draft Service Dog Law language. The motion was seconded by Ms. Lynn Heitz, however after further discussion Ms. Julia Barol removed the motion from the floor.

MOTION was made again by Ms. Lynn Heitz to approve the draft Service Dog Law language. Ms. Joan Goodman seconded the motion.

Ms. Lynn Heitz voted yes.

Ms. Michelle Mitchell voted no.

Ms. Jessica Keogh voted no.

Ms. Joan Goodman voted yes.

Ms. Julia Barol voted no.

The motion was not passed.

- Ms. Keogh will contact staff with meeting dates prior to the next Committee meeting scheduled for May 20th. Members agreed there would not be enough time to amend language and meet to approve prior to the May 8th Full Council meeting. Members agreed that voting by email is not allowed under the Sunshine Act.

MOTION was made by Ms. Julia Barol to adjourn. Ms. Lynn Heitz seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.