

Pilot Dogs, Inc.

Chairman Young, Ranking Member LePore-Hagan and members of the House Economic Development, Commerce and Labor Committee. My name is Jason Gray and I would like to provide written testimony on HB 263. Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of Pilot Dogs, Inc. on this matter.

Pilot Dogs role in the community is to train and provide guide dogs to the visually impaired at no cost. In filling this role, since 1950, Pilot Dogs has developed a training program that creates a safe and independent guide dog team.

The foundation of this program rest on the guide dog's ability to adapt to and handle different situations. Our training process includes training specific responses to certain environments, including restaurants. The trained response in the restaurant environment, is to remain focused on guiding the person, thus ignoring people, food, and other stimuli while working through the restaurant. When the visually impaired individual finds a seat, the trained response for the guide dog, is to lay at the handler's feet, ignoring the surrounding environment.

Pilot Dogs has no objections to well controlled, behaved, and leashed pets, that are current on their inoculations as prescribed by their Veterinarian or local laws. The concern for the guide dog team centers around situations in which the pet is not controlled or behaved. The concept of a pet being well controlled and behaved is complicated by the training expertise of the dog handler. Acceptable behavior for a pet can be starkly different than that of a guide dog. Excessive environmental stimuli can have a direct effect on the guide dogs focus and safety of their work.

The second concern for the guide dog team is the currently unclear distinction between a pet and a guide dog. The general public does not necessarily understand this distinction and can misinterpret the behavior of a pet dog as a service dog. In extreme instances, this misinterpretation has led to the denial of the rights afforded to the visually impaired by the American Disability Act. In less extreme situations, it has led to ill willed feelings toward the visually impaired Pilot Dog user.

On behalf of Pilot Dogs, thank you for the opportunity to present this written statement

Respectively Submitted,



Jason Gray

Assistant Executive Director