

The Veterans Subcommittee on Health
Hearing regarding H.R. 2792, Disabled Veterans Service Dogs and Health
Care Improvement Act of 2001

Views of Ms. Beth Barkley, Vice President, A Rinty of Kids™, Inc., on HR
2792's provision to authorize Veterans to receive Service Dogs

Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the important issue of Service Assistance Dogs for Veterans. Your excellent work and vision, as represented by H. R. 2792, provides opportunities for our Veterans to improve and normalize their lives.

Humans and canines have worked together for a long time. There are many proposed eras for the beginning of that association, and lengthy arguments to support each time period. It is sufficient to say that our partnership with dogs is ancient. Unfortunately some of the earliest "civilized" writings about dogs come from the early urbanization of humans, and those writings portray an animal that has gone from hunting partner to city scavenger in a particular area of the world. The written word is powerful to humans, so those early writings have given undue weight to the view of dogs as "unclean" and of little value. Far more evidence exists of the enhancements dogs bring to human life! Whether guarding, herding, leading, searching, hearing, assisting, or being a companion, the role of dogs as human partners is ever expanding.

In the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States, the general public became used to Guide Dogs for people with visual impairments. Hearing Dogs, for people with hearing disabilities have gained acceptance. Increasingly we read about, or see on television, reports on Assistance Dogs who help people with physical disabilities. An emerging discipline is the Psychiatric Service Dog.

Dogs have, compared to humans, a huge capacity to identify, sort, and retain scents. Dogs' primary means of communication is body language – which we humans don't read too well. Because certain dogs can predict an imminent seizure in their partner, there is research being done into the ability of dogs to recognize the changes in that the human brain experiences (chemical? electrical? We don't know yet) prior to the onset of seizures. Dogs are routinely trained to detect minute amounts of drugs, accelerants, explosives, as well as meat and vegetable material. From that training we produce Drug Dogs, Fire Dogs, and Bomb Dogs for law enforcement agencies, and the Beagle Brigade for the Department of Agriculture. Dogs have also been trained to indicate human skin cancer, and research in training is underway to expand to other types of cancer. Dairy herd owners use dogs to detect the proper time to artificially inseminate a cow. Search and Rescue Dogs find people who are lost or trapped, bodies of disaster and homicide victims, and body fluid evidence for law enforcement.

Guide Dogs help their human partners negotiate through the environment. Hearing Dogs alert their human partners to particular sounds in the environment. Assistance Dogs help their human partners overcome and mitigate the condition that disables the human. All of these dogs that work with humans are using their highly developed sense of smell, their acute power of observation, and other abilities, as well as their genetic predisposition to partner with us.

Assistance Dogs do the obvious tasks: retrieving objects, providing pulling power for wheelchairs, opening doors, taking objects from the partner to another place or person, reacting to a medical crisis in a specified way, physically assisting the person into or out of the wheelchair or bed or bathroom facility. In addition, **and most importantly**, Assistance Dogs can be trained to meet the **individual needs** of their human partner such as providing assistance in balance or pulling the bed clothes off or onto their partner. Appendix One is a list of common tasks for Assistance Dogs that I compiled from experience and from research on the Internet. **The end result of all these tasks is to increase the independence of the human and provide for their safety. The overall improvement to the quality of life for the human partnered with an Assistance Dog cannot be overemphasized.**

We often see programs about the athlete with a disability. The athlete who participates in wheelchair races develops strong arm, shoulder, and back muscles to propel themselves along. Others find special equipment, or develop it themselves, to participate in sporting activities. Some people, however, have disabilities that require them to husband their strength rather than strive to develop it. They may not seem disabled at first glance. Their hidden disability can be degenerative. An Assistance Dog that opens doors (handle, lever, "panic push bar"), or retrieves the dropped object, or reaches up to bring or place or activate something, helps their partner conserve the energy and reduces the "wear and tear" on joints and reduces the likelihood of injury. It is as if these folks were given a set amount of movements to "spend." Every movement (task) that the Service Dog performs for them avoids a withdrawal from their movement bank! People who suffer from chronic pain as a result of their disability can be helped in similar fashion.

Psychiatric Service Dog training was developed and brought to public light in 1997 by Joan Froling of Sterling Heights, Michigan. A mobility impaired Service Dog trainer, Ms. Froling has done extensive research into developing Service Dog tasks for those suffering from Panic Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and disabling Depression. In Appendix Two I have included her list of tasks for this type of Service Dog.

I will speak only briefly regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act. Since 1990 the numbers of Service Dogs has increased dramatically. Acceptance of these dogs in public places, in compliance with the ADA, has also increased, but not in parallel with the numbers of Service Dogs. There are still too many incidences of ignorance of the law or outright rejection of the rights of persons with Assistance Dogs. I can only imagine the distress of a person partnered with a Service Dog as they approach yet another public facility and wonder what attitude and situation they will be confronted with *this time*. Part of the problem is, of course, the varying State Laws that exist to regulate Service Dogs. As an example, imagine being a partner with an Assistance Dog in the Washington, D. C., area, and how much paperwork you would need to keep with you to address concerns by restaurant managers in Virginia, Maryland, and DC! The ADA and compliance is fruitful ground for another subcommittee, so I will leave it alone.

There is a serious life-long commitment on the part of the Assistance Dog provider, trainer, and disabled recipient. Dogs are living beings. They are the alien species that chose to live with us (unlike cats that let us live with them!). They do not have removable batteries or off switches. They cannot be deactivated like a toy and put on the shelf until further need. Many, many people do not believe that a dog is a life-long commitment. Look at the number of public and private shelters in the United States and how many dogs are killed because they do not have a home. An estimate by the ASPCA in 1998 reported 15 dogs were alive for every adult in the USA. I don't know the

accuracy of that estimate or what the number might be today, but I know that there are too many dogs being killed for frivolous reasons. Taking a dog into your home is a life-long responsibility – the life of the dog (and I don't think dogs live long enough!). The recipient of a Service Dog must understand the commitment. If they have a family, the family must understand the commitment.

A human must have regular medical treatment, eat well, exercise appropriately, pick up their trash, behave well, and be loved. All those things are true for the Assistance Dog, too! The dog must be healthy and have regular veterinary care. This assures a dog that remains in good health for service, and assures the public that zoonotic diseases are not a concern. The dog must have time off from work, time when they can exercise and be a dog. The dog must be well trained, behave well, and know the tasks that their partner requires. And the dog must be loved – unloved dogs do not thrive and they do not maintain a high level of working ability. Call it the mammal baseline for life, what is necessary for the human is necessary for the dog!

Service Dogs require basic training and specific training. Basic training, which includes all types of socialization from weaning forward, is most often done in a foster home. Strict guidelines and tasks to be learned are provided to the approved foster home. The dog must be non-aggressive to humans and other animals (dogs, cats, squirrels, birds) that might be encountered during a days activities. They learn to be non-disruptive (meaning no inappropriate vocalizations), they must be most thoroughly house broken, and must be clean (as odor free and free of loose hair as possible).

When the young dog emerges from the foster home they are ready to learn specific tasks. While there are some common tasks for Service Dogs, bringing an object is an example, most of the tasks will be specific to the recipient. It is common for a Service Dog and partner to have the trainer go to them, observe the life needs of the partner, and do the specific task training on-site. Trainers often go to the home of the Assistance Dog and partner after the initial training to "fine tune" tasks, or develop new tasks based on need.

This level of individual training is a must, both for dog and recipient partner, and there are costs associated with this training. Estimates range from \$15,000 to \$25,000 per dog, and that includes volunteer help. Foster homes usually receive money only for dog food and veterinary care. The organizations sponsoring Assistance Dogs are most often non-profit, relying on donations for operating expenses (Appendix Three lists some Web pages of Assistance Dog organizations and links). Some trainers are paid, but not usually enough to provide a living income (they sell other types of training to exist). Expenses would include, among others, trainers time, facilities, food and veterinary care, dog transportation, training equipment, harnesses, jackets, identification cards, recipient transportation and time. While donations have sustained the training and placement of most existing Assistance Dogs, you need only hear about the extensive waiting lists for these dogs to know that donations are not meeting the need and many deserving partners do not yet have their Assistance Dogs.

It is reassuring to note that the tasks (or training criteria) listed by the organizations providing Assistance Dogs are relatively standard across the world. This is a unique and precious circumstance as there seems to be little to no fighting between organizations on what an Assistance Dog needs to know. This is not often the case in emerging disciplines and speaks to the understanding and research done by Assistance Dog organizations.

The conclusions are clear: there is an extensive need for Assistance Dogs. There are standard tasks identified as a basis for Assistance Dog training. There is consensus that specific tasks must be developed and taught for each dog/partner team. There are large and small organizations sponsoring Assistance Dog training, most of which are non-profit. The benefits provided by Assistance Dogs are many and range from help with mobility, balance, preservation of strength, and object retrieval and placement, to seizure detection, partner safety, and securing help for the partner. The appropriate law exists on the Federal level to allow access for Assistance Dogs and partners. Many states have laws that further define Assistance Dog access (such as where dogs in training are allowed). It is time our disabled veterans are routinely provided the opportunity to benefit from Assistance Dog use. Our veterans should be authorized to receive Assistance Dogs per H.R. 2792.

APPENDIX ONE

What are the tasks that an Assistance Dog can do?

- Pull wheelchair
- Open doors
- Close doors
- Pick up objects
- Place objects (putting money on a tall counter)
- Repeatedly bring objects (newspaper every day from door)
- Carry objects (eg. notes) to designated person (by learned name or from hand indication)
- Bring telephone
- Replace telephone
- Carry or drag bags (books, groceries)
- Bring own food bowl
- Bring named clothing (coat, gloves, boots, shoes)
- Place items in clothes washer
- Pull items from clothes dryer
- Drag wheelchair to bedside
- Seek and find named person
- Go out on command, touch objects until correct one is indicated, bring back (or by laser indication)
- Carry items between partner and others
- Place items in trash can
- Bring bag with medication from usual place
- Bring liquid drink (in can or container)
- Open closets, cupboards
- Turn off or on lights
- Bring TV or radio remote control on command (or even find it!)
- Open refrigerator door
- Open and close bathroom stall door
- Pull off shoes, socks, trousers, etc.
- Pull covers on or off of partner in bed
- Bring leash, collar, harness to partner
- Bring duffel bag with "dog equipment" to partner, from vehicle, off of hook on wheelchair, etc.
- Knock receiver off of large button telephone and push "911" pre-programmed button with nose or paw
- Carry appropriate weight of objects (papers, laptop PC, cell telephone, etc.) in back pack
- Bark, and continue barking, for help
- Brace and assist partner in and out of wheelchair, bed, toilet, bath, vehicle, etc.
- Brace on command
- Wake up partner at sound of smoke alarm

APPENDIX TWO

What are the tasks that a Psychiatric Assistance Dog can do?

- Mobility tasks as listed in APPENDIX ONE
- Fetch medication bag, purse, etc., from normal place
- Lead partner to designated exit from office
- Use appropriate telephone to dial (pre-programmed button) 911 on hearing smoke alarm
- Nudge partner during "freezing" episode (panic attack, Parkinson's Disease suffer) to enable further movement
- Go to specified family member and bark for emergency help
- Leave house/office and go to specified neighbor and bark for emergency help
- Remove photo ID card and/or explanation card from back pack or pocket on wheelchair for speech impaired partner and hand it to designated person
- Notify partner at specific, repetitive times of day to take medication
- Alert partner and assist them out of room or building at sound of smoke alarm
- Place themselves between partner and anyone else on command for partners with Reflex Sympathy Dystrophy, other painful condition, or traumatic claustrophobic syndrome
- Vocalize on hand signal in order to provide "excuse" for partner to leave area when panic attack is imminent
- Search vehicle or home for intruders before partner enters

While the public is not encouraged to think of the Assistance Dog as a defensive device and they are not trained to attack, training the dog to look around and/or bark on a hand signal can provide the partner with added security in isolated situations (at the ATM) or when suspicions are aroused.

APPENDIX THREE

Various Web sites for Assistance Dog organizations, many containing further links. The sheer number of sites on the Web devoted to Assistance Dog training organizations is testament to the validity of these dogs and the great need for them.

<http://deltasociety.org> The Delta Society

<http://www.independencedogs.org> Independence Dogs Inc.

<http://www.iaadp.org> International Association of Assistance Dog Partners

<http://www.assistance-dogs-intl.org> Assistance Dogs International Inc.

<http://www.tagonline.com/Ads/CCI/> Canine Companions for Independence

<http://www.adai.org/> Assistance Dogs of America Inc

<http://www.arfkids.com> A Rinty For Kids (ARF Kids) Inc.

Another informative site:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/psych/dog/assist.htm> Dr. P's Assistance Dogs