



The Honorable Mary Hayashi
Chair, Assembly Committee on Business Professions and Consumer Protection
State Capitol, Room 3013
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 1491 - Amendment to Business and Professions Code Section 7210.7 – In-Home Training

Dear Assembly Member Hayashi:

The State Board of Guide Dogs for the Blind (Board) is writing in support Senate Bill 1491 which authorizes licensed guide dog schools and instructors to provide in home training for guide dog users in California, regardless of their previous experience with a guide dog.

In the 1940s, since there were no minimum standards for guide dog school operation, it was possible for anyone to start a school. Many schools were inadequate and thus dogs were poorly trained. One of the 19 schools had a snake charmer for a guide dog trainer. In addition, not only was guide dog school funds not being used for which they were solicited, the visually impaired ended up as the victims. For the protection of the blind and visually impaired, standards needed to be established. On July 8, 1947, Assembly Bill 2391 (Brown, Niehouse, Gafney, Hawkins & Price) was signed by Governor Earl Warren. Advantages of a guide dog board were 1) keeping out the fly by night schools 2) protecting the blind by ensuring minimum training standards are met for their training and the training of the guide dog 3) oversight of the disposition of donor funds to licensed schools 4) licensing and regulation of guide dog instructors.

Existing law is unclear, restrictive and problematic. It does not allow consumers who wish to receive in-home training to do so unless previous training in an in-residence program has occurred, or the requirement of an in-residence program poses an undue hardship on the first time guide dog user. Existing law also does not allow out-of-state licensed instructors to compete for this training venue with licensed instructors from California. Additionally, consumers required to attend the 28 days of training in an in-residence program meet the following challenges:

- Emotional challenges including; being away from children (or other dependents), pets, dependents, pets and home, and the stress of being away from the person's place of employment.
- Financial challenges including; not having four weeks of vacation, taking unpaid leave, alternate dependent care costs, arranging for an individual to take care of bills, pet sitting/boarding/house sitting fees.
- Logistical challenges including; difficulty finding services for dependent care for only one month (if consumer has a dependent living with them).
- Physical challenges including; sleeping in a dorm facility versus the comfort of one's own home, dietary challenges of eating on the same schedule as one's classmate and different foods, and;
- Finally, the other health challenges are being away from a consumer's physician/provider. This may pose a challenge for those with special needs such as consumers that are on dialysis.

SB 1491 seeks to accomplish the following:

- Allow schools to provide in-home training regardless of the guide dog users' experience with a guide dog. The statute needs to be clarified to give a licensed, out-of-state instructor the authority to provide in-home training in the State of California. Making this clarification would result in giving consumers in California more choice in selecting an in-home provider of guide dog instruction.
- Delete the requirement that allows in-home training only for special circumstances. Currently, California consumers who are interested in attending an out-of-state school must leave California for the training. If the language is amended, California schools can still be competitive if they can also provide in-home training as a venue for instruction, regardless of the circumstances of the guide dog user.
- Clarify that the statute gives Board licensed instructors the ability to provide in-home training in the State of California and that out-of-state instructors need not be employed by a Board licensed guide dog school. The in-home training model as a venue of training is consistent with international training standards. There is no cost for consumers for a guide dog so there would be no competition for costs between schools. The ways in which guide dog schools stay competitive are to keep up with the needs of students in the quality and quantity of training provided.

The amended language presented is the result of a collaborative process which included input from senior instructors at the three guide dog schools, consumer input, and Board Member consideration.

For the reasons mentioned above, the Board is supportive of SB 1491. If you have any questions or concerns regarding any of the information provided above, please feel free to contact me at (916) 574-7825. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Thomas Scott

TOM SCOTT

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