

SCS SB 33 -- PERSONS WITH MENTAL DISABILITIES

SPONSOR: Lamping (Grisamore)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities by a vote of 9 to 0.

This bill adds an individual with mental disabilities or diabetes to the list of people who must be afforded the same rights as those without disabilities to use streets, highways, sidewalks, walkways, public buildings, public facilities, and other public places. An individual with mental disabilities or diabetes is also entitled to equal accommodation from common carriers, airlines, motor vehicles, trains, buses, taxis, and any other public conveyances or modes of transportation, as well as hotels, places of public accommodation, and other places to which the general public is invited and to be accompanied by a guide, hearing, or service dog in any of these places without being required to pay an extra charge.

A member of a service dog team has the right to be accompanied by the dog while the dog is in training and will be liable for any damages to a facility caused by the dog during training. A service dog team consists of a trained service dog, a disabled person or child, and an adult person who has been trained to handle the dog. The term "service dog" is revised to include a search and rescue dog that is trained to assist a person with a mental disability from becoming lost and a service team dog that has been trained to help with the search and rescue of an individual with a disability.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that these dogs are trained to perform specific tasks, and they are increasingly used to assist individuals with mental disabilities or health risks like diabetes or epilepsy. These dogs should be given the same rights as are given to dogs assisting individuals with other disabilities.

Testifying for the bill were Senator Lamping; Representative Allen; Matthew Shell; and Shawn Shell.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that the dogs are not trained for specific tasks. These dogs are lunging, barking, and biting because there is no state certification to become a trainer for these types of dogs. A lot of veterans are using poorly trained dogs to help cope with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and their dogs are creating dangerous situations themselves.

Testifying against the bill was Susan Bass.