

SS SB 644 -- SERVICE ANIMALS

SPONSOR: Hoskins

This bill modifies the definition of a "service dog" to be a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. This bill also adds "mental health service dog" to the definition of a service dog. A mental health service dog, or a psychiatric service dog, is a dog that has been individually trained for an owner who has a psychiatric disability, medical condition, or developmental disability. The dog is trained to perform tasks to mitigate or assist the owner with difficulties directly related to the disability (Section 209.200, RSMo).

Under this bill, any person who knowingly misrepresents a dog as a service dog, as described in the bill, for the purposes of receiving accommodations regarding service dogs under the Americans with Disabilities Act shall be guilty of a class C misdemeanor for the first offense and also be civilly liable for any actual damages resulting from the misrepresentation, and a class B misdemeanor for each subsequent offense.

Additionally, any person who knowingly misrepresents any animal as an assistance animal, as described in the bill, for the purposes of receiving accommodations regarding assistance animals under the Fair Housing Act or the Rehabilitation Act shall be guilty of a class C misdemeanor for the first offense and also be civilly liable for any actual damages resulting from the misrepresentation, and a class B misdemeanor for each subsequent offense (Section 209.204).

The Governor's Council on Disability shall prepare and make available online a placard for posting in a front window or door of a business stating that service dogs are welcome and that misrepresenting a service dog is a violation of Missouri law. The council shall also prepare and make available a brochure detailing guidelines regarding service dogs and assistance animals (Section 209.204).