PRINT PAGE 1

Hello,

My name is Jim Thomas and I am a resident of the Province of Ontario with a disability. It is my understanding that the government is currently preparing necessary amendments to improve the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

I have a well trained and certified service dog that I was very fortunate to receive from National Service Dogs Canada, located in Cambridge, Ontario, who are accredited by Assistance Dogs International. My Service Dog has improved the quality of my life significantly and has afforded me with the ability to get out in public more. Last year, I was refused service in a local restaurant and berated by the owner. As I suffer from Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, you can imagine the impact that this incident had upon me emotionally and with my recovery. I filed a complaint under the Human Rights Act and successfully won that case. My point is that I believe that regulations need to be enacted that are enforceable. Yes, I had access under the Human Rights Act Tribunal, but that was very costly financially and emotionally, as well as having to wait a year and a half for resolution and closure.

Secondly, there should be clear regulations as to the bona fide need to have a service dog, as detailed in the Human Rights Act. It is my understanding that provinces such as British Columbia and Alberta have already created or are in the process of creating legislation that governs the use of certified service dogs as well as providing government issued photo identification for the handler as proof of certification. Currently, in Ontario; there is far too much abuse by people who have neither the need, or a properly trained dog; but just slap a vest on their little FiFi so that they can go to a public place such as a restaurant with their beloved pet. It is tantamount to parking in a Handicapable space when you have no need to other than having a sense of self-entitlement to do that. As well, the increasing number of people committing these offences are causing confusion for business owners. They are not equipped to understand the difference between a Service Dog or an emotional support animal. Without receiving the benefit of proper training:, there is risk of the dog doing something inappropriate or worse; suddenly becoming aggressive. All business owners and employees operating within our province should receive mandatory training in Accessibility rights before being granted a license. I know that at our local WalMart store, employees report having received instruction on accessibility rights and responsibilities as it pertains to Service Dogs as part of their initial staff training. I have yet to experience any challenge, or rudeness from a WalMart employee while working with my dog as a result.

Thirdly, there are a number of individuals offering on-line training or hands-on training who neither certified or qualified to do so. I have a friend who is an Afghanistan veteran diagnosed with severe PTSD. He felt that he could not wait for a properly trained dog because the waiting periods to get one have increased significantly. He purchased a vest that proclaims Service Dog In Training and the providers of that training are not necessarily qualified or accredited to do so. Regulations to govern the certification of persons or organizations offering Service Dog training are necessary for everyone’s safety.

Thanks very much for your consideration and I urge you to include specific legislation regarding the use of Service Dogs in Ontario for everyone’s sake… the handler, the public and business owners. I suggest to you that enacting regulations that consider the aforementioned points; will save everyone, including the government a lot of unnecessary wasted time, money, or worse health of a citizen. At the very least, please consider beginning a process of studies to assist in the creation of said legislation. It would save people a lot of difficulty and unnecessary challenges. If this is already being considered by the government, I am unaware of any committees currently studying the issue. I welcome your feedback.

END OF FILE 1 OF 1.