

Question on Notice

No. 526

Asked on 14 July 2015

MR STEVENS asked the Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Seniors and Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland (HON C O'ROURKE)—

QUESTION

Will the Minister advise what safe guards are in place to ensure that pet dogs are not issued with assistance dog certificates inappropriately to circumvent body corporate living rules?

ANSWER

Guide, hearing and assistance dogs are highly trained dogs that perform tasks and functions that alleviate the effects of a person's disability and enhance their independence and ability to access the community. The Queensland *Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs Act 2009* (the Act) sets clear standards that trainers, training organisations and handlers and their dogs must meet, to assure the public that dogs approved under the Act meet high standards of conduct and health.

The Act is an opt-in arrangement where both training organisations and guide, hearing and assistance dog handlers can choose to seek approval.

As part of the approval process, handlers and dogs are required to pass a Public Access Test, which is conducted by a trainer approved under the Act. An assistance dog will only be certified for a person with disability if they pass a public access test to show that the dog is safe and effective in a public place or public passenger vehicle, and able to be controlled by the handler of the dog. The dog must be desexed, vaccinated and have not been declared a dangerous dog under a local law. It must also demonstrate it is able to perform identifiable physical tasks and behaviours to assist the person in a way that reduces the person's need for support.

Under the Act, an approved handler (a person with disability who relies on a guide, hearing or assistance dog to reduce their need for support) is required to display a handler identity card containing a photo of the handler and the dog, to confirm they are an approved handler-dog team. People in charge of public places or public passenger vehicles may ask to see this card to ensure the dog is certified under the Act.

The Act requires certified handlers and their dogs to have the same access to public places, public transport and accommodation as everyone else. Individuals can be fined up to \$12,000 and corporations up to \$59,000 for denying such access.

The *Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1977* prohibits a body corporate from restricting or prohibiting the keeping by a resident of a guide, hearing or assistance dog. Any person with concerns about the certification of a particular guide, hearing or assistance dog should contact the Complaints area of the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services on 1800 080 464.