

Senate Fiscal Agency
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Senate Bill 456 (as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Gary Peters
Committee: Farming, Agribusiness and Food Systems

Date Completed: 11-18-99

RATIONALE

When puppies are going to be trained to become leader dogs for the blind, hearing dogs for deaf or audibly impaired persons, or service dogs for individuals with other physical limitations, the puppies first are placed in foster homes for approximately a year to 14 months. Although the puppies continue to belong to the organization that will train them, the foster families are responsible for all of the dogs' expenses, such as food, veterinary care, and mileage. The families also are required to pay the puppies' dog license fees.

Since 1970, leader dogs for the blind have been exempt from licensing fees. This exemption was extended to hearing dogs in 1981, and to service dogs in 1984. It has been suggested that the puppies being raised to become assistance dogs also should be exempt from the licensing fees, in order to help defray the cost of their care.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Public Act 207 of 1970 (which exempts leader dogs, hearing dogs, and service dogs from licensing fees) to add that dogs owned by a partnership, corporation, or other legal entity that trained dogs for the exempted purposes would not be subject to any licensing fee.

MCL 287.291

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

All puppies that are going to become leader dogs, hearing dogs, or service dogs are placed in a private home until they are ready to begin their formal training. Presently, foster homes in Michigan are raising 214 puppies for Leader Dogs for the Blind and 81 puppies for Paws with a Cause, which trains hearing dogs (which can alert individuals to the sound of such things as smoke alarms, telephones, and doorbells), service dogs (which perform such tasks as opening doors, turning light switches on and off, and picking up objects), combination dogs (which are trained for the dual purpose of hearing and service dog tasks, hearing and leader dog tasks, or service and leader dog tasks), and seizure response dogs. Although these organizations actually own the puppies, the foster families are liable for all of the expenses of raising them. In addition to paying the usual costs of food and veterinary care, foster families can incur considerable mileage, since the puppies must be transported to the many types of settings where they will eventually provide assistance.

Dog license fees are regulated by the Dog Law, which permits county boards of commissioners to set fees at a level sufficient to pay the counties' expenses of administering the law. According to a representative of Leader Dogs for the Blind, license fees range from approximately \$10 to \$25. Although some counties apparently waive the fees for puppies being raised in foster homes, that practice is not necessarily widespread or followed consistently within a county. By creating a statutory license fee exemption for dogs that are owned by an organization that trains dogs to become leader dogs, hearing dogs, or service dogs, the bill would ensure that the "foster puppies" would be exempt from license fees, as the trained, adult dogs already are. This exemption would provide some financial relief to the volunteers who generously bring the puppies into their homes, care for them for at least a year, pay all of their expenses during this time, and then return them for formal training and eventual placement with

individuals with disabilities.

Furthermore, although these dogs would be exempt from license fees, they still would be subject to the law's licensure, vaccination, and identification requirements.

Supporting Argument

Since the bill would apply to dogs owned by a training organization, the license fee exemption would cover all of the dogs that they train. Although the puppies are placed in foster homes, some dogs come to the organizations as adults. These dogs also would be exempt from license fees, which would help reduce the training organizations' operating costs.

Legislative Analyst: S. Lowe

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on the State. By eliminating license fees for leader and service dogs in training, the bill would minimally reduce county revenues.

Fiscal Analyst: R. Ross

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.