

The Free Lance-Star

Gov. Kaine signs bill allowing service dogs into state schools

Kaine signs service-dog bill

By [Chelyen Davis](#)

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RICHMOND--

With two service dogs at his side, Gov. Tim Kaine yesterday ceremonially signed a bill that will require schools to allow children who need such dogs to bring the animals to school.



The bill, sponsored by Del. Mark Cole, R-Spotsylvania, clarifies that public schools are "public entities," or places of public accommodation, which must comply with all requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Virginians With Disabilities Act. School officials had argued that schools shouldn't be considered public entities under the ADA.

The law will take effect July 1.

It was prompted by the case of 10-year-old Matt Hooios, a Stafford resident who suffers from X-linked hydrocephalus and who has a service dog. But Stafford school officials won't let Matt take the dog to Margaret Brent Elementary School with him. So Matt's parents, frustrated with the school system's refusal to allow their son a tool they believe helps him learn and be more independent, turned to Cole for help.

Stafford school officials said some schools allow service dogs on a case-by-case basis.

The Hooios family was among several families to attend the ceremonial bill-signing yesterday. Kaine also ceremonially signed a related bill from Del. Adam Ebbin, D-Alexandria, that clarifies that trainers of service dogs can accompany those dogs into public buildings.

"I was very interested to hear Matt's story," Kaine told Matt's parents, Sharon and Tom Hooios. "It's really clear that when Congress passed the law, that they intended it to apply to public bodies."

Kaine said that the state's position on ADA law is that "we're not going to try to shirk our responsibility" and that localities should be complying with the law as well.

"It's not neat to have a bad experience, but it's neat to take it and make something good out of it," Kaine said.

But the Hooioses aren't convinced their battle is over. They say that just last week, the school system again denied their appeal to allow Calder to go to school with Matt. The Hooioses said they were notified a day before their regular meeting with school officials to go over Matt's IEP (Individual Education Plan) that their request was being denied. Wanting more time to consult a lawyer, the Hooioses didn't attend the IEP meeting.

The law doesn't take effect until July 1, so the school isn't doing anything it hasn't done before.

Tom Hooios said yesterday that he understands the state Department of Education plans to issue guidelines on the new law for school districts. He hopes that will help prompt Stafford schools to comply.

"The Virginians With Disabilities Act has been around for 23 years. It's time for the school system to pay attention to it and obey it," Hooios said.

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 Sad (posted by Lindsay_H , May 17, 2008 6:48 pm) [Report this post to admins](#)


Its sad how people are so uneducated about service dogs. Before you start worrying about them biting do a little Reading about them. I myself have a service dog and He had to go through excessive training kids can poke him prod him and even pull his ears and he will ignore it. They are trained to do this. And as for allergies the ADA isnt worried about that if kids have allergies to dogs they will just have to deal with it or move to a different school!

 Oh, for pete's sake (posted by ithinkican2002 , May 8, 2008 10:03 am) [Report this post to admins](#)

We should not worry about the dog biting someone yet. They are well-trained to deal with situations before being allowed to "work" and I cannot help wondering who would want to hurt such a child? Please stop borrowing trouble before you know about service animals. I also remember reading in an earlier story about this that one teacher fought it because she was allergic to dogs. What does she do when she is not at work and even more dogs abound? This child has a right & she can take an allergy pill.

 What about liability (posted by bubbleman , May 7, 2008 1:08 pm) [Report this post to admins](#)

When a service dog bites somebody, do the taxpayers pay? It will happen. The dog perceives his charge to be in peril, some kid steps on a tail or instigates the animal...and what about the many children with allergies? Stupid move, IMO, and I love dogs.

 time to make a real fuss (posted by dcsuburb , May 7, 2008 6:31 am) [Report this post to admins](#)

If the county wants to again deny the help this kids is in need of again i suggest they just go ahead and sue the school system they don't want one dog how about a large multi million dollar payout for there stupidity and then tell the other parents why theres no money for the school system I think there would be a new school board fast..