

Senate Executive Departments and Administration Committee

Kevin Condict 271-7875

SB 198, declaring the third week in September to be New Hampshire service dog week.

Hearing Date: March 5, 2025

Time Opened: 9:52 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:04 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Pearl, McGough, Gannon, Altschiller and Reardon

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill declares the third week in September to be New Hampshire service dog week.

Sponsors:

Sen. Watters

Sen. Birdsell

Sen. Lang

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Sen. Avard

Sen. Fenton

Sen. Pearl

Sen. Altschiller

Rep. Bixby

Rep. Comtois

Rep. D. Kelley

Rep. Wheeler

Who supports the bill: Sen. David Watters (SD 4), Mo Baxley, Victoria Lee, Brendan Madden, Laura Barker (Hero Pups), Becky Jewell, Nicholas Goulet, Sen. Donovan Fenton (SD 10), Maria Sillari, Don Chick, Michael Bonfanti, William Baber, Janet Lucas, Jeffrey Bernstein, Kellie Couch, David Whitney, Gina Ricciardelli, Stefanie Ragonese, Colleen MacGilvray, Margaret Jameson, Regan Jameson, Jodi Langellotti, Kelly Daniel, Anita Mathur, Steven Wourgiotis, Katherine Basken, Chase Eagleson (NHCDD), Sara LeFever, Colleen Noonan, Angel Smith, Woreen Bogle, Ruth Benedict, Sen. Debra Altschiller (SD 24), Lori Nason, Jessica Nyby, David Madden, Linda Madden, Jonathan Madden, Sheila Gardner, Kaitlin Cohen, Anne Michiels, Nicole Gorski, Thomas Gorski, Melissa Wilson, and Jill Brooks.

Who opposes the bill: Laura Hilbert, Oliver Matte, and Hannah Willcutt.

Who is neutral on the bill: None.

Summary of testimony presented:

Senator David Watters, Senate District 4

- Sen. Watters introduced Senate Bill 198.
- Sen. Watters explained that this bill was brought to him by a constituent. This bill recognizes the profound impact that service dogs have on the lives of individuals in New Hampshire. He said service dogs enhance independence, mobility, and overall quality of life for people with disabilities.
- Sen. Watters explained that the bill will declare a service dog week and the governor will issue a proclamation.
- Sen. Watters stressed how important it is that the State increase awareness of the functions of service dogs and the good they offer to the community. He said the range of things that service dogs do is extraordinary.
- Sen. Watters said that many know the book about Elle Shaheen, who has a service dog who has saved her life many times by being able to detect blood sugar issues for people with serious diabetes.
- Sen. Watters said he chose this week because September is National Service Dog Month, and he wanted New Hampshire's Service Dog week to be in that month.
- Sen. McGough said that service dogs are important to him and his family. He said the only emails he has received on the bill question which week to pick. He noted that September is National Service Dog Month and that there is another week in August.
 - o Sen. Watters said that was the date that advocates brought forward. He said he has responded to those emails and explained why they chose this date. He said those emails seemed sufficient to those people.

Brendan Madden, New Hampshire Coalition for the Support of Service Dogs

- Mr. Madden explained that he is the founder and chairman of the New Hampshire Coalition for the Support of Service Dogs. They are a non-profit committed to advocacy and education about service dogs, as well as providing financial aid to residents of New Hampshire for their service dogs' veterinary bills.
- Mr. Madden explained that service dogs were first trained for wounded veterans of World War I. Since then, service dogs have continued to be trained and have provided assistance to people of all walks of life and disabilities.
- Mr. Madden noted that service dogs are recognized by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), whereas emotional support dogs are not. Emotional support dogs are not accorded the same protections and legal standing.
- Mr. Madden stated that a New Hampshire awareness week would help people differentiate between emotional support dogs and service dogs. He said this week would also help to show people the beneficial services that service dogs provide.

- Mr. Madden addressed Sen. McGough's earlier question. He said that August is International Service Dog Month.

Laura Barker, Hero Pups

- Ms. Barker said she supports this bill. She started a nonprofit that trains psychiatric service dogs for veterans and first responders. She said they also train facility comfort dogs. She said there is a big difference between the two.
- Ms. Barker said the educational component of the bill is needed. She said being able to use that week to educate town employees, business owners, and others about what the rights are. She stated that she spends twenty percent of her volunteer hours explaining the difference between service and comfort dogs.
- Ms. Barker said she hopes most accounts of fake service dogs are due to lack of education. She said this week would help give her organization a platform to educate on that matter.

Nicholas Goulet

- Mr. Goulet explained that his service dog, Nissa, came from Hero Pups.
- Mr. Goulet explained that he was a firefighter. He received an injury on the job in 2018. In 2019, a coworker passed away on a job while covering a shift for Mr. Goulet. He said that he could not get over the loss and required mental health treatment, mostly for post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Mr. Goulet said that getting Nissa was a process. He had to go through the application and interview process. He stated that Nissa has changed his life for the better.
- Mr. Goulet said this bill is a great opportunity to increase awareness and educate others.