**Briefing Note – Guide Dogs and Bill 48, Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act, 2019**

**Issue**

CNIB Guide Dogs and GDUC applaud the government’s recent announcement to establish policies and guidelines respecting service animals in schools through an amendment to the Education Act through Bill 48, Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act 2018. We see this these changes as an opportunity to provide clarity to schools so that they are empowered to fully accommodate guide dog handlers within the school system.

Schedule 2 of Bill 48, Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act 2019, proposes that "The Education Act is amended to provide that the Minister may establish policies and guidelines respecting service animals in schools, and require boards to comply with the policies and guidelines and to develop policies in accordance with those policies and guidelines".

There is currently no mention in the Bill of the difference between guide dogs and service animals, such as:

* It is standard practice for guide dog schools in Ontario that a person is 18 before they receive a guide dog. This is because a person requires competent skills in Orientation and Mobility, and also requires a good level of maturity as they are responsible for their dog. They also require a solid understanding of dog psychology and behavior, as training is an ongoing process because guide dogs are customized to cope in a variety of environments. This means that, in all likelihood, students who have a guide dog will be in the final years of high school.
* Guide Dogs differ from other service animals in this respect, because service animals are often handled by a third-party, such as in the case of a young child with autism support person. A student with a guide dog is responsible for their dog and will require the dog to be with them at all times, unless otherwise directed by the student.
* Unlike other service animals, guide dogs are already covered legally by the Blind Persons’ Rights Act, with their own accreditation rules separate to service animals which are defined under AODA. Many guide dogs in Canada are from the United States and also fall under the International Guide Dog Federation guidelines. Standards for guide dogs are already firm and consistent across the board, while Service Animal regulations are in their infancy.

**Recommended Outcomes**

* A separate set of guidelines must be created to distinguish between guide dogs and service animals, and consideration must be given on how these new laws interact with the Blind Persons’ Right Act, which permits guide dog handlers to enter any places where the general public is customarily admitted.
* The policies should not only address the needs of students with guide dogs and service animals, but also guide dog handlers who are teachers, co-op students and other external guests to the school. For example, CNIB has experienced situations where schools have asked that we do not send an Ambassador with a guide dog as a speaker at a public outreach event, as the school is not clear on what the rules are.
* CNIB and GDUC have also worked with school boards previously on service animal and guide dog policies, and we would be happy to share further details around best practices to be included in school board policies.

**Background**

In April 2017, CNIB began its 100th year with the launch of the CNIB Guide Dog Program to raise and train guide dogs – exclusively for people with sight loss. CNIB Guide Dogs delivers a best-in-class guide dog program that is not only designed to meet the specific needs and preferences of the blind community and managed to the most rigorous of quality standards, but include ongoing efforts to ensure the built environment and social attitudes change to a universal acceptance, recognition and understanding of guide dogs.

Guide Dog Users of Canada provides a forum for those wishing to give or receive [Peer Support](https://gduc.ca/gduc/member/articleList.asp?articleType=2); educates the public about the abilities of [Guide Dogs](https://gduc.ca/gduc/member/articleList.asp?articleType=3), and the rights of those partnered with guide dogs; promotes the high standards and integrity of guide dog training; and assists with individual or systemic [Advocacy](https://gduc.ca/gduc/member/articleList.asp?articleType=4) whenever necessary. Additionally, Guide Dog Users of Canada maintains a [Wellness Fund](https://gduc.ca/gduc/member/articleList.asp?articleType=6) in order to assist those individuals in financial need, partnered with guide dogs, with veterinary expenses that are not routine. Applicants must meet specified requirements at the time of application.

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