



News Release: The Manitoba Human Rights Commission

For Immediate Release

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The Manitoba Human Rights Commission releases Service Animal Public Consultation Report

School superintendents, rental property owners, service providers and service animal users agree that the Manitoba Human Rights Commission Consultation Report on Service Animals is a step in the right direction to reduce the confusion surrounding the rights and responsibilities of service animal users.

Since *The Human Rights Code* was amended in June 2012 and the term “guide dog” was replaced with “service animal,” there has been confusion about the right of individuals who use service animals to be free from discrimination, including guaranteed access to public establishments, and the corresponding obligations of employers, service providers and landlords, to ensure that freedom.

“Service animals, especially dogs, are increasingly being relied upon to meet the specialized needs of individuals with disabilities other than visual or hearing disabilities,” says Yvonne Peters, Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Board of Commissioners. “The evolution continues and this report reveals the path the Human Rights Commission will be taking to ensure the rights and responsibilities of everyone.”

Public consultations were held in Winnipeg and Brandon in September and October 2014. Participants included service providers, school representatives, rental property owners, and users of various animal assistants.

Associations such as the Manitoba Restaurant and Foodservices Association (MRFA) and the Manitoba Hotel Association (MHA) support the report and appreciate that its concerns are being acknowledged. Scott Jocelyn, Director of the MRFA says that the consultation and following report recognizes that clarification and education on what is a service animal is imperative to make sure everyone’s rights are protected. “I am especially looking forward to working with the Commission and other stakeholders, including the Provincial Government, to work towards further solutions,” he says.

Frank Koch-Schulte President of Professional Property Managers Association (PPMA) agrees and emphasizes that clarification is an important element when deciding when to consider reasonably accommodating certain animal assistants in rental housing.

The need for a better understanding is echoed by school representatives and business owners as well as service animal users.

“The most important aspect of these consultations is to ensure service animal users do not face barriers and are allowed equal access to rental/condominium housing, employment opportunities, and public services,” says Ms Peters.

Susan Hardie, the Executive Director of the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies and service animal user, who attended the consultation, agrees with Ms Peters, adding that persons with invisible disabilities using service animals can face even more barriers and the proposed actions are important steps towards eliminating these barriers.

“The education component is imperative and I look forward to working with the Commission to ensure that all service providers receive the clarity they require,” says Ms Hardie.

The report includes a series of actions to be implemented by the Human Rights Commission and recommendations to other stakeholders. A revised Board of Commissioners policy has been approved. Substantive changes will be made to existing guidelines and new informational fact sheets will be developed over the next six months.

The report and the Commission’s Board policy on service animals are on the Commission’s website www.manitobahumanrights.ca.

To arrange interviews, please contact:

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Supporters of the report

Geri Harder-Robson an Assistant Superintendent in the Hanover School Division
Jim Baker President and CEO of the Manitoba Hotel Association
Frank Koch-Schulte President of Professional Property Managers Association
Susan Hardie, the Executive Director of the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies
Service animal user

Scott Jocelyn, Director of the Manitoba Restaurant and Foodservices Association
Donald Teel Winnipeg School Division 1 participant at consultation
Candace Borger, administrator, educational support, St. James Assiniboia School Division

Tanis Pshebniski, Assistant Superintendent, education and programs, St. James Assiniboia School Division

George Leonard, Master Dog Trainer, Courageous Companions
River East Transcona School Division
Disabilities Issues Office, Province of Manitoba