



Pine Tree Guide Dog Users  
*Opening Doors to Independence and Opportunity*

[www.PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org](http://www.PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org)

March 19, 2023

Dear Honorable Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

On behalf of Pine Tree Guide Dog Users, a nonprofit membership organization promoting the inclusion and acceptance of blind people with guide dogs who reside or visit the state of Maine, I welcome the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of LD 988 “Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Conduct an Accessibility Study of All Maine State Parks and Historic Sites and to develop a Plan to Remove Access Barriers.”

One of the most common challenges faced by guide dog teams is a lack of awareness or misconceptions about guide dogs in public places. As a result, when attempting to access recreational programs, services, and/or facilities at Maine’s State parks and historical sites, some guide dog handlers have experienced the following barriers:

#### Service Animal Identification

Heightened concerns about the fraudulent representation of pets as service animals has led to greater scrutiny of visitors with legitimate service animals. Unfortunately, not all staff members who interact with the general public are aware of the laws regarding the identification of a service animal. When it is not obvious that a dog is a service animal, staff need to know that they may ask only two questions to identify whether the animal is a service animal: (1) Is the animal required because of a disability? and (2) What work or tasks has the animal been trained to perform? Some visitors with guide dogs have reported being asked to provide “certification,” training documentation, or proof of rabies vaccination for their dogs. They’ve also reported that the absence of a service animal vest has caused problems. An accessibility study could pinpoint any shortcomings in this area.

## Safe Operations

Unsubstantiated fears about potential risks to wildlife, their habitats, the guide dog's safety, etc. have resulted in the unnecessary exclusion of service animals from some areas open to the general public. An accessibility study would enable each park and historical site to conduct a careful and informed assessment about areas of concern where the presence of a service animal may be disruptive or unsafe. For instance, experts could study whether or not the close proximity of a well-behaved service animal to the nesting grounds for endangered shorebirds at Reid State Park would or would not be disruptive or harmful.

Another common challenge is the lack of information available in a format that is accessible to blind and low vision visitors. This can prevent the visitor from obtaining service animal guidelines or even basic knowledge regarding program offerings (e.g., brochures, registration forms, deadlines, videos, special events, tours) and other important information readily available to others with sight. An accessibility study could help determine the best way to reach people who are blind or visually impaired.

Finally, since many locations are not accessible by public transportation, guide dog handlers often rely on family, friends or group outings to visit these places. This can make it even more awkward and humiliating for the handler to be denied access or unexpectedly excluded from areas where others in their party intended to go. Poorly handled inquiries and unfounded restrictions can also "ruin" a much-anticipated outing for both the handler and other members of the party.

I urge each of you to please vote in favor of LD 988 to help ensure that all visitors, including those who are accompanied by guide dogs, can enjoy everything Maine Parks and Historical Sites have to offer. Thank you for your consideration. Should you have questions, or wish to learn more about Maine's guide dog teams, please contact me or visit our website at [www.PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org](http://www.PineTreeGuideDogUsers.org).

Sincerely,

Pauline LaMontagne

President, Pine Tree Guide Dog Users

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Pine Tree Guide Dog Users  
LD 988

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