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March 12, 2003

The Honorable  
Senators of the State of Nevada

Dear Senators:

Nevada State Law does not yet consistently protect the rights of blind individuals and their dog guides to safely travel within the communities without being attacked by uncontrolled dogs. As a guide dog user living in Nevada, I urge you to sponsor the passage and enforcement of a Guide Dog Protection Law!

When a guide dog is no longer serviceable as a guide due to physical or emotional effects following an attack - it is not only devastating to the blind handler to lose this valued companion and source of mobility, often they seldom forget the memory of such an incident. It is a terrible violation of the guide dog user's basic right to walk in their neighborhood and community.

The cost of the dog and services from an organization that trains dog guides can range up to approximately \$60,000.00 per person/dog team. Of course, these highly trained animals are far from being ordinary dogs or pets; they enhance our freedom, safety and independence.

A right of citizenship is the liberty to travel without fear of obstruction through our community. Blind citizens who travel with guide dogs have been seriously attacked by other people and their unrestrained animals. Such attacks have seriously injured, disabled, or killed guide dogs with little or no legal implications. However, due to similar attacks on police animals, they have enacted legislation to protect such animals. Contending that the animal is the extension of the police handler then it is therefore, equally true that the guide dog is an extension of the blind handler.

Nevada should have legislation that any person or animal of any person causing physical or psychological harm, temporary or permanent disability, or death to a guide dog commits a felony of the third degree, not just a gross

misdemeanor. Legislation should provide for restitution for the full replacement of the animal and for full rehabilitation and training of the handler and animal. It should also, invoke the speedy trial provisions of state statutes for crimes against the disabled.

Having been attacked several times by 'pet' dogs myself, I feel the punishment should also include the following penalties of \$5,000 minimum fine for first offenders and one year's jail time for the attacking dog's owner or one who harbors the animal. A \$10,000 fine for intentional attacks and "serious jail time." Law enforcement and the public must understand the importance of guide dogs.

To date, sixteen (16) states have recognized this problem and have passed laws protecting those who use guide and service dogs to assist them in living active lives. Currently, several other states such as Ohio, Minnesota, Hawaii and Florida are in the process of seeking stronger legislation for the protection of these hardworking animals.

In conclusion, I am troubled that again, law enforcement handlers and their police dogs are trying to be classified as "service" animals. They teach police dogs to attack and be aggressive. The American with Disability Act (ADA) does NOT recognize police dogs as service animals and neither should any state. I am NOT in favor of classifying police dogs as service animals.

Sincerely,

Mary A. Yoshisato  
And Decker, my guide dog