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Description automatically generated**NEVADA GOVERNOR’S COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

**Position on Service Animals**

Service animals play a vital role in supporting individuals with disabilities, including those with I/DD. They are trained to perform specific tasks that mitigate a person’s disability, such as interrupting self-harming behaviors, guiding individuals through public spaces, reminding individuals to take medication, or providing deep pressure therapy during times of distress.

While much of the public recognizes service animals for individuals with physical disabilities, it is essential to acknowledge their value for individuals with I/DD. Service animals are not pets — they are tools for autonomy and inclusion. However, people with I/DD often face skepticism and barriers when accompanied by service animals, especially when their disability is not immediately visible or when the animal performs non-physical assistance tasks.

**The Nevada Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities (NGCDD) supports the rights of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) to access and utilize service animals to enhance independence, safety, emotional well-being, and quality of life. The Council affirms that service animals are critical supports for people with I/DD and should be recognized and protected under state and federal laws without unnecessary barriers or discrimination.**

**Policy Recommendations:**

1. **Education and Training**: State agencies, schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations should receive ongoing training on the rights of individuals with disabilities to use service animals, with a focus on non-visible disabilities such as I/DD. Training shall include a clear distinction between service animals, emotional support animals, and therapy animals. A service animal is defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as a dog (or in some cases, a miniature horse) that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability. Guide dogs for the blind, seizure-alert dogs, and psychiatric service dogs are all examples. Emotional support animals, by contrast, do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.
2. **Policy and Enforcement**: The state shall strengthen and enforce anti-discrimination laws that protect individuals with I/DD and their service animals in housing, transportation, education, healthcare, and public spaces. Entities covered by the ADA may ask only two questions to determine whether an animal qualifies as a service animal: (1) Is the animal required because of a disability? and (2) What work or task has the animal been trained to perform? They may not require documentation or inquire about the nature of the individual’s disability.
3. **Access and Affordability**: Nevada should explore funding streams, grants, or partnerships to support the acquisition and training of service animals for individuals with I/DD, particularly those from low-income or underserved communities.
4. **Public Awareness Campaigns**: The Council encourages statewide efforts to educate the public on the role of service animals for people with I/DD, including clarifying the differences between service animals, emotional support animals, and therapy animals. Campaigns should also address misconceptions about access rights in public places and explain that although service animals are broadly protected under federal law, specific environments such as airlines may have their own regulations under the Air Carrier Access Act.
5. **Respect for Self-Determination**: Individuals with I/DD must be recognized as decision-makers in determining whether a service animal supports their needs, with access to person-centered planning that includes this option when appropriate. Individuals shall be supported in making informed choices about incorporating a service animal into their lives and empowered to advocate for their legal rights in public and private settings.

Last Review Date: