

Legislative Analysis



COURTROOM SUPPORT DOGS

Phone: (517) 373-8080
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Senate Bill 248 (S-1) as passed by the Senate

Sponsor: Sen. Dan Lauwers

House Committee: Judiciary

Senate Committee: Civil Rights, Judiciary, and Public Safety

Complete to 10-3-23

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

SUMMARY:

Senate Bill 248 would amend the Revised Judicature Act to change the age (from under 16 to under 18) of child witnesses who are allowed to be accompanied by a courtroom support dog when testifying. The bill also would allow an animal-assisted therapy or facility dog approved by the chief or presiding judge to serve as a courtroom support dog.

Section 2163a of the Revised Judicature Act authorizes special arrangements for witnesses in certain situations. Among other considerations, children who are 15 or younger and individuals of any age with developmental disabilities can have a support dog sit with them, or nearby, when testifying as a victim-witness in cases involving child abuse and neglect or physical or sexual assault. The bill would change the age for this provision to 17 or younger.

In addition, the act currently defines *courtroom support dog* as a dog that meets either of the following:

- It has been trained and evaluated as a support dog under Assistance Dogs International standards for guide or service work and is repurposed and appropriate for providing emotional support to children and adults in the court or legal system.
- It performed the duties of a courtroom support dog before September 27, 2018 (the effective date of the public act that expressly authorized the use of the dogs¹).

The bill would add that an animal-assisted therapy or facility dog approved by the chief judge or presiding judge of the court can be a *courtroom support dog* for purposes of section 2163a.

The bill would take effect 90 days after it is enacted.

MCL 600.2163a

FISCAL IMPACT:

Senate Bill 248 would have no fiscal impact on the state or on local units of government.

Legislative Analyst: Rick Yuille
Fiscal Analyst: Robin Risko

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

¹ See <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2017-2018/billanalysis/House/pdf/2017-HLA-5645-CFEC3FBF.pdf>