

**PETITION TO THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB
FOR RULE CHANGE ALLOWING BLIND, DEAF, OR
PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED DOGS TO COMPETE IN RALLY NOVICE,
COMPANION DOG OBEDIENCE,
AND TRACKING TESTS**

From Exhibitors to the American Kennel Club:

We, the undersigned, hereby petition the American Kennel Club (AKC) to change its rules disallowing dogs that are blind, deaf, or physically challenged from entry into competition for titles in Rally Novice and Companion Dog Obedience trials and Tracking (TD, TDX, VST) tests. Currently, the rules that disallow blind, deaf, or physically challenged dogs from entering Rally Novice and Companion Dog Obedience trials and Tracking tests provide:

“A dog that is blind or deaf or has been changed in appearance for cosmetic reasons (other than changes customarily approved for its breed) may not compete in any obedience trial or tracking test and will be disqualified.

“Blind means without useful vision. Deaf means without useful hearing. The judge will not obtain the opinion of a veterinarian.

“A dog that is lame in the ring at any obedience trial or at a tracking test may not compete in that class.

“Lameness is defined as any irregularity of locomotion. The judge must determine, without a veterinarian’s opinion, whether a dog is lame.”

Excerpted from AKC Obedience Regulations, amended to July 11, 2006, p. 8.

We ask that the American Kennel Club change the above-listed rules to read as follows:

Disabled dogs that can execute without special accommodation the performance requirements for Rally Novice and Companion Dog Obedience trials and Tracking (TD, TDX, VST) tests may enter Rally Novice and Companion Dog Obedience trials and Tracking (TD, TDX, VST) tests, and will not be disqualified for disability but, rather, for failure to meet the required performance standard for the event.

Disabled is defined as physically challenged in sight, hearing, or mobility. Physically challenged in mobility includes irregular gait that is not caused by or the result of a recent injury but results from the absence of a fourth limb, a congenital or developmental defect, or an injury when the dog does not exhibit signs of pain in any of its remaining limbs. The judge must determine, without a veterinarian’s opinion, whether a dog exhibits signs of pain in any of its remaining limbs.

We bring this petition because the current rules exclude blind, deaf, or physically challenged dogs from:

- working and training for competition and to become well-trained, tractable, and healthy members of their canine communities;
- enjoying activities available to other purebred dogs;
- working with their trainers and owners in the spirit of AKC responsible dog ownership; and
- entering tests and trials based solely on membership in a group (*i.e.*, dogs with certain specific disabilities) rather than the individual dog's ability or inability to perform the tasks required of the tests or trials.

Although we have not been made aware of any justifications that the American Kennel Club may have for its current rules disallowing *all* blind, deaf, or physically challenged purebred dogs from competing in Rally Novice, Companion Dog Obedience, and Tracking, we assert that allowing capable disabled dogs to compete:

- Enhances the AKC's public image of supporting the sport of dogs for all AKC-registered purebred dogs, including capable disabled dogs (*note that the United Kennel Club and the Association of Pet Dog Trainers currently allow participation of disabled dogs in performance events*).
- Preserves the current standard of performance for earning performance titles because no special accommodation for disabled dogs is requested, and handlers are currently allowed to direct their dogs with either verbal or hand signals.
- Preserves the judge's authority in the ring. In all AKC venues, judges are currently asked to evaluate dogs regarding disability (*i.e.*, lameness, as put forth in the AKC rule quoted above); hence, no tasks are being removed or added to the judge's set of current responsibilities.
- Is consistent with the AKC's encouragement of the disabled, including disabled handlers and canine therapy work in which disabled dogs are numerous and active.

WHEREFORE, we ask that the American Kennel Club change its rules disallowing blind, deaf, or physically challenged purebred dogs from entry in Rally Novice and Companion Dog Obedience trials and Tracking tests. We ask that the rules be changed to provide that such dogs may compete in AKC Rally Novice (RN) and Companion Dog Obedience (CD) trials and Tracking (TD, TDX, VST) tests.

Signed,

