



GUIDE TO SERVICE ANIMALS IN PUBLIC PLACES

Office of Human Rights

Federal, state, and local laws require that places normally open to the public must allow trained service animals to accompany people with disabilities onto the premises. This requirement applies to businesses, agencies, government offices, and health clinics.

WHAT IS A SERVICE ANIMAL?

A service animal is any dog that has been trained to perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability.

Under the law, a service animal is not considered a pet. Miniature horses also can be service animals under certain limited conditions; other species (cats, birds, etc.), however, are not considered service animals.

Service animals can perform many types of tasks, which must be directly related to the person's disability.

For example, dogs are trained to assist with navigation, to alert a person who is deaf to sounds, to alert an individual with seizure disorder to an oncoming seizure, to carry and pick up things for someone who uses a wheelchair, or to help with balance.

There are no legal requirements for service animals to be specifically identified by a collar, vest, or harness.

There are no federally recognized or required standards for service animal training, nor are there any federally recognized or required identification papers, licenses, documentation, certifications, or registration.

“No-pets” policies do not apply to service animals. You must make an exception for them.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF BUSINESSES

- *Businesses cannot require a person with a disability to show proof of a disability or certification of a service animal's status.* You may ask if the service animal is required because of a disability and what work / task the dog has been trained to perform.
- *Businesses cannot charge fees or restrict the areas where a service animal can go.* You must allow a service animal to accompany a person with a disability everywhere that other people normally are allowed to go, unless the animal's presence creates a basic change to your business operation or poses a threat to safety.
- *Businesses cannot restrict access to service animals because of health regulations.* The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) takes priority over local or state laws or regulations.
- *Businesses are not responsible for a service animal while a person with a disability is on the premises.* Care or supervision of a service animal is solely the responsibility of the animal's owner.
- *Businesses may exclude a service animal from the premises when its behavior poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others.* You do not have to accommodate a service animal when doing so would result in a fundamental alteration to the nature of the business or pose a threat to safety.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

City of Alexandria, Virginia • Office of Human Rights
703.746.3140 – **OR** – Virginia Relay 711
alexandriava.gov/HumanRights

Information will be provided in alternative formats to people with disabilities upon request.

