



Service Animals

More than pets for people with disabilities

Many people with disabilities use a service animal in order to fully participate in everyday life. Beginning on March 15, 2011, only dogs are recognized as service animals under Title II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). (Please visit the ADA website regarding the provision on miniature horses).



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The ADA does not restrict the type of dog breed that can be a service animal. Under the ADA, a service dog has been individually trained to do work or perform a task for an individual with a disability. The task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person's disability. Examples include detecting the onset of a seizure, providing stability for someone who has trouble walking, guiding someone with vision loss, and picking up items. (continued on next page)

Service Animals *(cont'd)*

People with disabilities have the right to train the dog themselves and are not required to use a professional service dog training program. Under the ADA, the dog must already be trained before it can be taken into public places. However, some state and local laws cover animals that are still in training. A service dog must be under the control of its handler.

The ADA requires state and local government agencies, businesses, and non-profit organizations (covered entities) that



provide goods and services to the public to make “reasonable accommodations” in the policies, practices, or procedures when necessary to accommodate people with disabilities.

In situations where it is not obvious that the dog is a service animal, staff may ask only two specific questions: 1) is the dog a service animal required because of a disability? and 2) what work or task has the dog been trained to perform? Staff are not allowed to request any documentation for the dog, require that the dog demonstrate its task, or inquire about the nature of the person’s disability. It is not required for the dog to wear a vest, ID, or specific harness; but it may be good practice so the public does not distract the dog from the work it is performing.



The ADA applies to housing programs administered by state and local governments, such as public housing authorities, and by places of public accommodation, such as public and private universities. In addition, the Fair Housing Act applies to nearly all types of housing, both public and privately owned, including housing covered by the ADA. Under the Fair Housing Act, housing providers are obligated to permit, as a reasonable accommodation, the use of animals that work, provide assistance, or perform tasks that benefit persons with a disability, or provide emotional support to alleviate a symptom or effect of a disability.



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