



Service Animals

Under the ADA, a service animal is defined as a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. The task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person's disability. For example, many people who are blind or have low vision use dogs to guide and assist them with orientation. Many individuals who are deaf use dogs to alert them to sounds. People with mobility disabilities often use dogs to pull their wheelchairs or retrieve items. People with epilepsy may use a dog to warn them of an imminent seizure, and individuals with psychiatric disabilities may use a dog to remind them to take medication. Dogs can also be trained to detect the onset of a seizure or panic attack and to help the person avoid the attack or be safe during the attack. Under the ADA, "comfort," "therapy," or "emotional support" animals do not meet the definition of a service animal because they have not been trained to do work or perform a specific task related to a person's disability.

The ADA does not require service animals to be certified, licensed, or registered as a service animal. Nor are they required to wear service animal vests or patches, or to use a specific type of harness. There are individuals and organizations that sell service animal certification or registration documents to the public. The Department of Justice does not recognize these as proof that the dog is a service animal under the ADA.

Allowing service animals into a "no pet" facility is a common type of reasonable modification necessary to accommodate people who have disabilities. Service animals must be allowed in all areas of a facility where the public is allowed except where the dog's presence would create a legitimate safety risk (e.g., compromise a sterile environment such as a burn treatment unit) or would fundamentally alter the nature of a public entity's services (e.g., allowing a service animal into areas of a zoo where animals that are natural predators or prey of dogs are displayed and the dog's presence would be disruptive). The ADA does not override public health rules that prohibit dogs in swimming pools, but they must be permitted everywhere else.

The ADA requires that service animals be under the control of the handler at all times and be harnessed, leashed, or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the service animal's work or the individual's disability prevents him from using these devices. Individuals who cannot use such devices must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal, or other effective controls.

Public entities may exclude service animals only if 1) the dog is out of control and the handler cannot or does not regain control; or 2) the dog is not housebroken. If a service animal is excluded, the individual must be allowed to enter the facility without the service animal.

Public entities may not require documentation, such as proof that the animal has been certified, trained, or licensed as a service animal, as a condition for entry. In situations where it is not apparent that the dog is a service animal, a public entity may ask only two questions: 1) is the animal required because of a disability? and 2) what work or task has the dog been trained to perform? Public entities may not ask about the nature or extent of an individual's disability.



The ADA does not restrict the breeds of dogs that may be used as service animals.

Therefore, a town ordinance that prohibits certain breeds must be modified to allow a person with a disability to use a service animal of a prohibited breed, unless the dog's presence poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others. Public entities have the right to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether use of a particular service animal poses a direct threat, based on that animal's actual behavior or history; they may not, however, exclude a service animal based solely on fears or generalizations about how an animal or particular breed might behave.

For additional information, see [ADA 2010 Revised Requirements: Service Animals \(PDF\)](#)