



SERVICE AND COMPANION ANIMALS:

A Guide to Animals in Public Places

City of Madison, Department of Civil Rights,
Equal Opportunities Division

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

WHAT IS A WORKING ANIMAL?

A working animal is any animal that assists a person with a disability.

Under the law, a working animal is not considered a pet. Dogs are the most common working animals, but other species (cats, birds, etc.) can also be working animals.

Working animals may perform many types of tasks for someone with a disability.

People with visual impairments use guide dogs. Other working animals are trained to alert a person who is deaf to sounds, to alert an individual with a seizure disorder to an oncoming seizure, to carry and pick up things for someone who uses a wheelchair, or to help with balance. Some animals provide emotional support and other therapeutic benefits.

Some (but not all) working animals wear special collars and harnesses. Some (but not all) are licensed or “certified” and/or have identification papers. **There are no legal requirements for these animals to be specifically identified.**

“No-pets” policies do not apply to working 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 working animal’s status.*
If you are not certain that an animal is a working animal, you may ask a person with an animal if it is a service, working or companion animal required because of a disability. However, you cannot ask someone to show proof of his or her disability or the need for the animal.
- ❖ *Businesses **cannot** restrict the areas where a working animal can go.*
You must allow a working animal to accompany a person with a disability everywhere that other people normally are allowed to go, unless the animal’s presence creates a fundamental change to your business operation or poses a direct threat to safety, or generally acts like a pet.
- ❖ *Businesses **cannot** restrict access to working 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 working animal while a person with a disability is on the premises.*
Care or supervision of a working animal is solely the responsibility of the animal’s owner.
- ❖ *Businesses may exclude a working 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 working 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

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Information can be provided in alternative formats.