

Service Animals in Public Libraries

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that organizations that serve the public, including public libraries, must allow people with disabilities to bring their service animals into all areas of the facility where patrons are normally allowed to go. This applies to patrons and employees. The protections provided by the ADA take priority over local and state laws and regulations.

WHAT IS A SERVICE ANIMAL?

The ADA generally defines service animals as dogs. Dogs employed as service animals may be any breed, size or weight. Some, but not all, service animals wear special collars or harnesses. Service animals are not required to have special licenses, to be certified, or to have any visible identification.

In addition to the provisions about service dogs, ADA regulations allow for miniature horses that have been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Miniature horses generally range in height from 24 inches to 34 inches measured to the shoulders and generally weigh between 70 and 100 pounds.

NOTE: In some situations, a person with a disability may require more than one service animal, where each animal provides a different type of assistance. For example, an individual may need both a hearing dog and a seizure alert dog.

WHAT DO SERVICE ANIMALS DO?

Service animals perform various tasks and provide services for people with disabilities. Here are some examples:

- **Guide** – serves as a travel aide for a person who is legally blind.
- **Hearing or signal** – alerts a person with hearing loss or deafness when a sound occurs, such as an alarm or a knock on the door.
- **Mobility assistance** – helps a person who has a mobility or health disability. They may carry, fetch, open doors, ring doorbells, activate elevator buttons, pull a wheelchair, steady a person while walking, help someone get up after a fall, etc.
- **Seizure response** – warns a person of an impending seizure, or provides aid during a seizure, such as going for help or standing guard over the person.
- **Therapeutic assistance** – aids people with cognitive or psychological disabilities, allowing them to live more independently. These animals may bring an emergency phone during a crisis, call 911 or the suicide hotline, turn on the lights in a dark room, bring medications, bark for

help in an emergency, assist a person with panic disorder in coping with crowds, etc.

- ***Psychiatric and neurological assistance*** - The use of service dogs for psychiatric and neurological disabilities is explicitly protected under the ADA.

Dogs or other animals whose sole function is “the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship” are not considered service animals under the ADA regulations.

SENSITIVITY AND AWARENESS

_____Public Library will ensure that staff members are properly trained in treating patrons and employees who require the assistance of service animals with sensitivity and respect.

Library staff cannot require patrons accompanied by service animals to provide documentation, such as special ID cards or proof of certification. Nor can they ask about the specific nature of a person's disability – e.g. "Are you blind?" or "Are you under a physician's care?"

Library staff may only ask:

1. Is your animal a service or assistance animal required because of a disability?
2. What tasks has your animal been trained to perform?

Based upon the answers to these questions library staff will make a determination as to the status of the animal as a pet or legitimate service animal.

The following guidelines provide some basic information on accommodating patrons and staff accompanied by service animals:

1. Staff will allow a service animal to accompany the patron/employee at all times and everywhere in the library except where animals are prohibited for safety reasons.
2. People with disabilities who use service animals will not be isolated from or treated less favorably than other patrons or employees.
3. Be aware that many people with disabilities do not care to share personal details about their disability or their service animal.
4. Do not separate or attempt to separate a patron or employee from the service animal.
5. Do not pet or talk to a service animal when it is working – this distracts the animal from its tasks.
6. Do not feed a service animal, which may have specific dietary requirements. Unusual food or food at an unexpected time may cause the animal to become ill.

7. Do not deliberately startle a service animal or make noises at the animal (barking, whistling, etc.).
8. If other patrons complain that they are not allowed pets and want to know why an exception was made, staff should state that the library complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Remember, the library will not require someone to provide details about his or her disability.

RULES FOR SERVICE ANIMALS

The library cannot place limitations on the size, weight and breed of service animals. They can, however, require service animals to meet reasonable behavior rules that ensure the safety of all library patrons, and require that service animals have current appropriate vaccinations.

The patron/employee has the responsibility to care for and supervise the service animal. The patron/employee should retain full control of the animal at all times.

This generally means that while the animal is in the library, it must be on leash, in a carrier, or otherwise in the direct control of its owner. When around other people or animals, the service animal should be well behaved (no jumping, snarling, nipping, excessive barking). The patron/employee is responsible for the safe removal of animal waste products.

Special provisions apply to miniature horses. ADA regulations set out four assessment factors to assist entities in determining whether miniature horses can be accommodated in their facility. The assessment factors are:

1. whether the miniature horse is housebroken;
2. whether the miniature horse is under the owner's control;
3. whether the facility can accommodate the miniature horse's type, size, and weight; and
4. whether the miniature horse's presence will not compromise legitimate safety requirements necessary for safe operation of the facility.

If these criteria are satisfied, the miniature horse must be allowed to accompany the disabled person within the facility.

REMOVAL OF A SERVICE ANIMAL

If a service animal is unruly, disruptive (aggressively jumping, nipping, etc.) or not house trained, the patron/employee may be asked to remove the animal. If the animal's inappropriate behavior happens repeatedly, the patron/employee may be asked not bring the animal into common areas of the library until steps have been taken to mitigate the behavior (such as refresher training). If the behavior poses a significant threat to patrons or employees, the patron/employee may be required to remove the animal from the library altogether.

WHAT ABOUT OTHERS WHO ARE AFRAID OF OR ALLERGIC TO ANIMALS?

A fear of or minor allergy to dogs or other animals is not a disability, so the library does not need to “accommodate” in those situations. In rare cases, a person’s allergy may be so severe that animal contact may cause respiratory distress. In those situations, the allergic person may also request an accommodation, such as keeping the animal and the allergic person separate, as much as is possible.

Any complaints about service animals in the library should be forwarded to the director.