

370 Service Animals

1.0 Background

The Washington Law Against Discrimination (WLAD) includes provisions prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities who use a service animal to assist them with the disability.

RCW 49.60.040 defines a dog guide as a “dog that is trained for the purpose of guiding blind persons or a dog that is trained for the purpose of assisting hearing impaired persons.” RCW 49.60.040 defines service animal as “any dog or miniature horse that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. The work or tasks performed by the service animal must be directly related to the individual's disability

Service animals are utilized by persons with a variety of disabilities and in many different ways. Service animals may lead blind people or serve as the ears of a deaf person. They may also carry and pick up items, be used for balance, and provide warnings of impending seizures or low blood sugar. Service animals may allow persons with anxiety disorders, PTSD or other emotional illnesses to function in society by alerting their handlers to avoid anxiety triggers, by recognizing and blocking behaviors, or by stimulating the person to “snap back” to a conscious state. Service animals can remind handlers that it is time to take medication, and can summon help in the case of fainting or a seizure.

2.0 Guidelines for Staff regarding Service Animals

A place of public accommodation cannot request that the service animal be removed unless it creates a risk of harm. This risk must be actual, and cannot be speculative or based on a fear of dogs. In addition, if an animal exhibits disruptive, poor or unsanitary behavior, it would not be considered a trained service animal, and can be removed.

An enforcement officer shall not ask about the nature or extent of a person's disability, but may make two inquiries to determine whether an animal qualifies as a service animal: if the animal is required because of a disability and what work or task the animal has been trained to perform. An enforcement officer shall not require documentation, such as proof that the animal has been certified, trained, or licensed as a service animal, or require that the service animal demonstrate its task.

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4.0 Staff Training and Service Animals Rules and Guidelines:

The District Executive Director or his/her designee will ensure that staff is properly trained in the facility's service animal policies, including the following rules:

1. Allow a service animal to accompany the person/handler at all times and everywhere on District property except where animals are specifically prohibited.
2. Do not pet or touch a service animal. Petting a service animal when the animal is working distracts the animal from the task at hand.
3. Do not feed a service animal. The service animal may have specific dietary requirements. Unusual food or food at an unexpected time may cause the animal to become ill.
4. Do not deliberately startle a service animal. Do not separate or attempt to separate a person/handler from her or his service animal. Avoid making noises at the animal (barking, whistling, etc.)
5. Avoid initiating conversation about the service animal, the person's disabilities or other service animals one has known. If you are curious you may ask if the person/ handler would like to discuss it but be aware that many persons with disabilities do not care to share personal details.
6. Remember, not all disabilities are visible. The nature of the person's disability is a private matter, and you are not entitled to inquire for details.
7. If other people complain about the fact that they are not allowed to have a pet and want to know why you have made an exception, simply state that the District complies with the Federal ADA and Washington Law Against Discrimination.
8. Service animals do not need to wear any special identifying gear such as tags, harnesses or capes.
9. A person may train his or her own service animal and is not required to provide any information about training or the specific tasks the animal performs.
10. The animal must be supervised, and the service animal handler must retain full control of the animal at all times.
11. Never allow the service animal to defecate on District property. If it happens it is the responsibility of the owner to clean it up.

5.0 Removal of a Service Animal:

When a service animal is unruly or disruptive (jumping on people, biting, or other harmful behavior), a District Supervisor or Head Guard may ask a person to remove the animal from the area. If the improper behavior happens repeatedly, the Supervisor may tell the person not to bring the animal into any area of District property until significant steps have been taken to mitigate the behavior. Mitigation can include refresher training for both the animal and the user.

6.0 Areas off Limits to Service Animals:

The District has designated certain areas off limits to service animals due to health and safety of patrons and the service animal, such as:

1. Service animals are not allowed in the water of the swimming pools.
2. Service animals are not allowed inside the sauna area
3. Any other areas where a significant health or safety hazard may exist.

These areas of restriction do not infringe upon the right of a person with disabilities to fully enjoy the amenities of the community and accommodations can be made to ensure.