Service Dog Access: Gatekeeper Guide

—behavior, not belongings—

Service dog access laws are set up to give the benefit of the doubt to people with disabilities, so gatekeepers can ask just two questions to determine whether it's a service dog—and so is reasonably allowed, just like a wheelchair.

(1) Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability? …and if the answer is “yes”, but the gatekeeper isn’t yet satisfied, the second question is…

(2) What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

Gatekeepers can’t: request documentation for the dog or require identifying gear, make the dog show a task, ask about the nature of the person’s disability, or charge extra.

Service dog or not, the dog must behave. A service dog must be housebroken, will not act aggressive, and should cause no disruption through unruly behavior its handler doesn’t effectively control. If a dog remains unruly, gatekeepers can require the dog be removed. An undiscrptive person should be welcomed back right away without the dog.

Service dogs and state laws

Some states permit service dogs in training in places of public accommodation while being trained, or offer increased protections to service dogs beyond federal law. State laws cannot restrict the rights guaranteed by federal laws, but may impose special requirements on service dog users for additional benefit.

With service dogs and dogs in training (where allowed), the dog is expected to be safe in public, and the person is liable for any damage caused by the dog. A service dog can be any breed and the person may have an invisible disability.

A service dog can be a guide dog, hearing alert dog, psychiatric service dog, diabetes alert dog, etc., and can be a chihuahua or a labrador, as long as the dog is individually trained to do work or perform tasks to assist with the person’s disability. Providing untrained comfort through its mere presence doesn’t qualify.

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