

United States federal Service Dog laws are contained in the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations § 36.202 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), which was updated in 2010. All information contained in this document is drawn directly from U.S. federal law and the ADA and must be followed.

Definitions Service Dogs, Disabilities, and Public Accommodations


“Service Dogs” are dogs specifically trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities, including physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disabilities.


A **“person with a disability”** has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities OR has a record of such an impairment OR is regarded as having such an impairment.

“Major Life Activity” refers to activities that an average person can perform with little or no difficulty.

A **“public accommodation”** is any facility whose activities affect commerce and where members of the public are able to frequent or be for any purpose, including, but not limited to, business, lodging, receiving services, purchasing goods, recreation, entertainment, obtaining health care or education, gathering and eating and drinking.


The Basics Everything You Need to Know About Service Dog Law


 There is no gear, ID, paperwork, “proof” of any kind or certification required by U.S. federal law for Service Dogs to work in public.


 Federal law mandates that any where a member of the general public is allowed to go, so may an individual accompanied by a Service Dog. This includes eating establishments, hotels, hospitals, universities, public transportation, movie theaters, stores and any other “public accommodations.”

 If a Service Dog is out of control or urinates/defecates indoors inappropriately, a place of public accommodation may legally ask the handler to remove the dog from the premises.

 A Service Dog must be under its handler’s control at all times.

 Places of public accommodation may not ask about the nature of a person’s disability, request private information concerning a person’s medical or psychiatric diagnosis or require documentation of any kind, even if a person’s diagnosis isn’t readily apparent or visible.

 Places of public accommodation may ONLY ask two questions if it is not immediately clear a dog is a Service Dog:
(1) if the dog is required because of a disability
(2) what tasks or work the dog has been trained to perform.

 A Service Dog team cannot be charged any fees or deposits for the dog’s presence. This includes places of lodging, public transportation and health care facilities.

 Federal law mandates complete access at no charge for all Service Dog teams.

