



Fido – Meet Your Roommate: Higher Learning Institutions Sometimes Need to Learn More About Service Animals

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When students go off to college or boarding school they sometimes want to bring their pets. If they live on campus it is unlikely they will be permitted to move in with their dog. There is an exception, however, for disabled students who request that their service animal be permitted to live in student housing with them. The same laws that ensure student housing is accessible and barrier-free also cover the needs of these students.

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), the Fair Housing Act, (FHA), and the Rehabilitation Act address issues beyond construction standards and accessibility issues. These laws require reasonable modification of policies and practices to accommodate disabled individuals with service animals.

When most people think of a service animal they think of dogs. But dogs are no longer the only service animals. Indeed, monkeys, pigs, and miniature horses now may serve this role. Furthermore, animals are now trained to provide far more services such as hearing or signaling (alerting deaf individuals to sounds); mobility assistance (pulling wheelchairs; picking up things that are dropped; providing stability for walking); and seizure alert/response (alerting owners to impending epileptic seizures). Further, in addition to "service animals," there are "emotional support animals."

The Department of Justice defines "service animal" as "any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including, but not limited to, guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals with impaired hearing to intruders or sounds, providing minimal protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair or fetching dropped items."

Accommodating a disabled student is, of course, the right thing to do. It is also the "legal thing" to do, so be sure that your legal counsel has reviewed the applicable laws. Then you will be rightfully contributing to the rich culture that exists on our campuses.

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