

Service and companion animals

Author

Northwest Justice Project

Last Review Date

November 12, 2024

Learn about how an animal can qualify as a service animal and why it matters.

What is a “service animal”?

If you live in Washington State, the legal definition of service animal is (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=49.60.040>) a dog or a miniature horse who’s trained to do work or perform tasks directly related to their owner’s disability. The state law specifically says that emotional support animals do **not** meet the legal definition of service animals.

What might qualify under the law as work or tasks related to the owner’s disability?

Here are some examples. This isn’t a complete list:

- Guiding an owner who is blind or has low vision
- Pulling a wheelchair
- Helping during a seizure
- Detecting allergens
- Fetching the owner’s medication or phone

What places can my service animal go to with me?

Under state law, most places that aren't someone's private home must allow your service animal. This is true even if the dog or miniature horse hasn't yet finished its training to be your service animal.

The list of places that by law must allow your service animal includes <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=49.60.040>), but isn't limited to, everything from courthouses, public libraries, public schools, and public bathrooms, to restaurants, sports arenas, stores, hotels, and more.

There are 3 exceptions to this law:

- Certain places run by a church can refuse entry to your service animal. (For example, religious schools and religious cemeteries can refuse entry to your service animal.)
- A private club, such as a country club or a fraternity house, can refuse entry to your service animal.
- Homeless shelters and other temporary lodging for people who are homeless can refuse entry to a service animal **that is still in training** and its owner.

Are there any other special rules for my dog or miniature horse who is still in training to be a service animal?

You can be asked to remove your service animal in training if you haven't yet trained it to urinate and defecate in appropriate places. You can also be asked to remove the animal if it's out of your control.

Why is it important to know if my pet qualifies as a service animal (or service animal in training)?

If a service animal's trained purpose isn't apparent from watching it, a police officer or the staff at a place you're trying to enter with your dog or miniature horse can ask you:

- Do you need the animal because of a disability?
- What work or task has it been trained to do for you?

But they can't ask you to demonstrate the animal's training. They also can't ask for proof that your dog or miniature horse is a service animal.

What happens if they don't agree that my pet is a service animal?

If law enforcement or staff determine after talking to you that your dog or miniature horse isn't a service animal under the state's legal definition, you may have to remove the animal from the premises or face a fine.

Do I have to answer their questions?

If you don't answer questions designed to determine if your dog or miniature horse is a service animal under the state's legal definition, you may have to remove the animal from the place right away or face a fine.

WashingtonLawHelp.org gives general information. It is not legal advice. Find organizations that provide free legal help on our [Get legal help](#) page.