

Augusta University

Policy Library

Service and Comfort Animal (Students)

Policy Owner: Student Affairs

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy establishes the different requirements between the uses of comfort animals and service animals for students with disabilities. It is necessary because comfort animals must be allowed in student housing with the required documentation but they do not necessarily have to be allowed in any other areas, depending on documentation. This is a distinct difference from all service animals, which must be allowed at all times

AFFECTED STAKEHOLDERS

Indicate all entities and persons within the Enterprise that are affected by this policy:

- Alumni Faculty Graduate Students Health Professional Students
 Staff Undergraduate Students Vendors/Contractors Visitors
 Other:

DEFINITIONS

Pet – any animal kept for ordinary use and companionship. Assistance animals (service and support animals), as defined below, are not considered pets.

Service Animal – any dog or miniature horse that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual or other mental disability. The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the person’s disability. The provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship does not constitute work or tasks for the purpose of this definition. Species other than dogs or, in some cases, miniature horses, are not considered service animals for the purpose of this definition of a service animal.

Emotional Support or Comfort Animal – an animal that provides emotional or other support that ameliorates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person’s disability. Unlike service animals, support animals are not required to be trained to perform work or tasks, and they include species other than dogs and miniature horses.

PROCESS & PROCEDURES

Service Animals

Service animals will generally be permitted to accompany people with disabilities in all areas of Augusta University's facilities, including University Housing, where students, members of the public, and other participants in services, programs or activities are allowed to go. However, it should be noted that Augusta University may prohibit or restrict the access of service animals in certain facilities due to health or safety matters and concerns where the presence of a service animal may compromise the integrity of a sterile clinical environment or ongoing research programs (Please refer to the section on Exceptions and Exclusions).

Enrolled students with service animals should be registered with Disability Services. This is not a request for an accommodation, but merely a way to track the animals that are on campus. Augusta University does not require documentation, such as proof that the animal has been certified, trained, or licensed as a service animal. It should be noted that visitors with service animals are not required to register with Disability Services.

Additionally, Augusta University cannot ask about the nature or extent of a person's disability to determine whether a person's animal qualifies as a service animal. However, when it is not readily apparent that a dog is a service animal, Augusta University staff may make two inquiries to determine whether the dog qualifies as a service animal, which are:

- Is the animal required because of a disability?
- What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?
- If any employee has questions regarding the designation of the service animal, they should contact Testing and Disability Services.

A service animal must be housebroken (i.e., trained so that it controls its waste elimination, absent illness or accident) and must be kept under control by a harness, leash, or other tether, unless the person is unable to hold those, or such use would interfere with the service animal's performance of work or tasks. In such instances, the service animal must be kept under control by voice, signals, or other effective means.

Augusta University's Office of Testing and Disability Services will assess requests for the use of miniature horses by people with disabilities on a case-by-case basis. Requests should be submitted to the Department of Testing and Disability Services and consistent with applicable laws. Augusta University may permit the use of a miniature horse if certain criteria are met and the horse has been trained individually to perform tasks for the benefit of people with disabilities.

Support (or Comfort) Animals

Unlike service animals, support animals are generally not allowed to accompany persons with disabilities in all public areas of Augusta University. In accordance with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development regulations, support animals may reside in University Housing, including

accompanying such individual in all public or common use areas of University Housing, when it may be necessary to afford the person with a disability an equal opportunity to use and enjoy University Housing. Before a support animal can move into University Housing with a person with a disability, a request must be submitted to Augusta University’s Department of Testing and Disability Services and approval must be granted (preferably at least 30 days prior to move in). If the disability is not obvious, Testing and Disability Services may require documentation from a licensed physician or mental health professional, to provide sufficient information to determine:

- That the individual qualifies as a person with a disability (i.e., has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities); and
- That the support animal may be necessary to afford the person with a disability an equal opportunity to use and enjoy University Housing (i.e., that the animal would provide)
- Emotional support or other assistance that would ameliorate one or more symptoms or effects of the disability).

While support animals are generally not allowed indoors on Augusta University’s campus other than in University Housing, people with disabilities may request approval from the Department of Testing and Disability Services to have support animal accompany them to other campus areas. Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis consistent with applicable laws.

GUIDE AND HEARING TRAINEES

Georgia state law allows animals being trained as service animals for persons with physical, sight, and or hearing impairments the same access that is afforded animals that are already trained and certified {O.C.G.A §30-4-2}. However, documentation stating that the handler is working with an accredited agency is required.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITES USING SERVICE OR COMFORT ANIMALS

Augusta University is not responsible for the care or supervision of service or comfort animals.

People with disabilities are responsible for the cost, care, and supervision of these animals, including:

- Compliance with any laws pertaining to animal licensing, vaccination, and owner identification;
- Keeping the animal under control and taking effective action when it is out of control; and
- Feeding and walking the animal, and disposing of its waste

People with disabilities who are accompanied by service or comfort animals must comply with the same University rules regarding noise, safety, disruption, and cleanliness as people without disabilities.

Exceptions and Exclusions

Augusta University may pose some restrictions on, and may even exclude a service or comfort animal in certain instances.

More specifically, service animals may be restricted from research laboratories and research housing facilities to mitigate the following risks:

1. Anxiety, Physiologic and Behavioral Impacts on Laboratory Animals (due to interspecies conflict)- Predator-derived visual, auditory, and olfactory cues induce hardwired defensive responses in prey animals and odors from felines and canines, specifically elicit innate fear and stress reactions in rodents, which could alter experimental conditions and results.
2. Interspecies Disease Transmission- Many laboratory animal species are particularly susceptible to pathogenic organisms and non-research animals entering laboratory facilities from outside present an unmitigated risk.
3. Chemical and Biosafety Hazards - Many research laboratories utilize highly toxic biological and/or chemical agents that require rigorous standard operating procedures for handling and storage as well as personal protective clothing or equipment. These agents can present significant health risks to animals.
4. Contamination of Experiments- Many research laboratories conduct experiments using sterile protocols where contamination (e.g. external RNA/DNA) could lead to misleading or erroneous results.

There also may be possible restrictions of service animals in clinical environments (i.e. health sciences programs) if there are reasonable safety concerns for the animal, the handler, or others. Under these circumstances, it will be necessary for the person with the service animal to register with Disability Services to discuss reasonable accommodations.

As previously noted, support animals are generally not allowed indoors on Augusta University's campus other than in University Housing. Persons with disabilities may request approval from Testing and Disability Services to have the emotional support animal accompany them to other campus areas as a reasonable accommodation. Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis consistent with applicable laws. An animal may be excluded from an area in which it was previously authorized to be only if:

- It is out of control and effective action is not taken to control it ;
- It is not housebroken (or in the case of a support animal that deposits waste in a designated cage or litter box, the owner fails to clean such a cage or box such that cleanliness of the room is not maintained); or
- It poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others that cannot be mitigated by reasonable modifications of policies, practices, or procedures or the provision of auxiliary aids or services.

In consideration of whether a service or comfort animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others, an individualized assessment will be made, based on reasonable judgement, current medical knowledge, or the best available objective evidence, to determine: (1) the nature, duration, and severity

of the risks; (2) the probability that injury will occur; and (3) whether reasonable modifications of practices, or procedures, or provision of auxiliary aids or services, will mitigate the risk.

Complaints about a service or comfort animal should be made in writing to Testing and Disability Services. A committee will be convened to make appropriate decisions regarding the service animal, based on all of the information available, and using the previously listed criteria. A written statement of explanation will be given to any person with a disability whose service or comfort animal is deemed to fundamentally alter the nature of a program, service, or activity

In the event that restriction or removal of a service or comfort animal is determined to be necessary, the person with a disability will still be given the opportunity to participate in the service, program or activity without having the animal present.

The above provisions on restrictions and exclusions are not intended to cover modifications to reasonable accommodations. The reasonable accommodation process and modifications to reasonable accommodations are covered under Augusta University's policy on reasonable accommodations.

As previously noted, support animals are generally not allowed indoors on Augusta University's campuses other than in University Housing. Persons with disabilities may request approval from Testing and Disability Services to have the emotional support animal accompany them to other campus areas as a reasonable accommodation. Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis consistent with applicable laws.

GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS OF THE AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

To ensure equal access and nondiscrimination of people with disabilities, members of the Augusta University community must abide by the following practices:

Allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities on campus;

- Do not ask for details about a person's disabilities;
- Do not pet a service animal, as it distracts the animal from its work
- Do not feed a service animal;
- Do not deliberately startle, tease, or taunt a service animal; and
- Do not separate or attempt to separate a person from his/her service animal.

If you have a disability that may be affected by the presence of animals, please contact Testing and Disability Services. Augusta University is committed to ensuring that the needs of all people with disabilities are met and will determine how to resolve any conflicts or problems as expeditiously as possible.

Grievance Procedure

Any student or employee who wishes to file a disability discrimination complaint should refer to the appropriate grievance procedure located in the AU Student Manual or Employee Manual.

REFERENCES & SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Documentation criteria for specific disabilities can be found here:

<http://www.augusta.edu/tds/disabilityservices.php>

Augusta University Employee Manual

https://www.augusta.edu/hr/documents/au_employee_handbook.pdf

ADA regulations regarding service animals can be found here:

http://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm

US Department of Housing Comfort Animal regulations can be found here:

https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=servanimals_ntcfheo2013-01.pdf

RELATED POLICIES

Intentionally left blank.

APPROVED BY:

Interim Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Augusta University

Date: 1/4/2021

President, Augusta University

Date: 1/4/2021