

Service Animals

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Purpose and scope

The Mason County Public Library recognizes that service animals assist people with disabilities to cope with the effects of their disabilities. Under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) animals are defined only as dogs (and, in some situations, miniature horses). Service animals may be any breed, size or weight. Some, but not all, service animals wear special collars or harnesses. Service animals are not required to have special licenses, to be certified, or to have any visible identification.

In some situations, a person with a disability may require more than one service animal, where each animal provides a different type of assistance. For example, an individual may need both a hearing dog and a seizure alert dog.

Service animals can perform various tasks and services for a disabled person and can be trained to do so by their owners. Some services include:

- *Guide* – serves as a travel aide for a person who is legally blind.
- *Hearing or signal* – alerts a person with hearing loss or deafness when a sound occurs, such as an alarm or a knock on the door.
- *Mobility assistance* – helps a person who has a mobility or health disability. They may carry, fetch, open doors, ring doorbells, activate elevator buttons, pull a wheelchair, steady a person while walking, help someone get up after a fall, etc.
- *Seizure response* – warns a person of an impending seizure, or provides aid during a seizure, such as going for help or standing guard over the person.
- *Therapeutic assistance* – aids people with cognitive or psychological disabilities, allowing them to live more independently. These animals may bring an emergency phone to the disabled person during a crisis, call 911 or the suicide hotline, turn on the lights in a dark room, bring medications, bark for help in an emergency, assist a person with panic disorder in coping with crowds, etc.

- *Psychiatric and neurological assistance* - The use of service dogs for psychiatric and neurological disabilities is protected under the ADA.

Dogs whose sole function is “the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship” are not considered service dogs under the ADA.

The Library must allow people with disabilities to bring their service animals into all areas of the facility where customers are normally allowed to go.

There are no limitations on the size, weight, or breed of service animals. Service animals must be well-behaved and “on duty” at all times in the Library’s facilities. The owner must maintain direct control of the service animal at all times, on a leash or in a carrier. The owner is responsible for the sanitary disposal of any waste that is created by the service animal.

Verification of need

Library employees may only ask whether the service animal is required because of a disability and what tasks the animal has been trained to perform.

Based upon the answers to these questions, staff members will make a determination as to the status of the animal as a pet or legitimate service animal. Employees cannot require documentation such as special identification cards or proof of certification for the animal. Staff will never ask about the specific nature of a person's disability.

Removal of a service animal

If a service animal is unruly, disruptive (aggressively jumping, nipping, etc.) or not house trained, staff may ask the patron to remove the animal. Repeated inappropriate behavior may be a cause to restrict a service animal to (or from) certain areas of the facility until demonstrated steps have been taken to eliminate the inappropriate behavior.

If the behavior remains uncorrected and restrictions do not mitigate the impact of the behavior, the Library may prohibit the service animal from the Library’s facilities and grounds altogether.

Allergies and fear of animals

A fear of or minor allergy to dogs or other animals is not a disability in the guidelines of the ADA. The Library is not required to “accommodate” patrons in those situations.

Still, in rare cases, a person’s allergy may be so severe that animal contact may cause respiratory distress. In those situations, the allergic person may request an accommodation and the Library may act to separate, as much as possible, the service animal and the allergic person.

Sensitivity and awareness

The Library will ensure that its staff members are instructed about service animal policies. The Library requires that its patrons and staff members:

- Allow a service animal to accompany the patron at all times and everywhere in the facility except where animals are prohibited for safety reasons
- Will not separate or attempt to separate an owner from a service animal
- Will not pet or talk to a service animal when it is “on duty”
- Will not feed a service animal, which may have specific dietary requirements
- Will not deliberately startle a service animal or make noises at the animal (barking, whistling, etc.)
- Be aware that many people with disabilities do not care to share personal details

Violations of these requirements by staff could result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Violations by a patron(s) will be considered unacceptable behavior and will be addressed according to the “Acceptable Behavior” policy including restricting access to the Library or removal from the Library.

Complaints

Any complaints about a service animal's behavior, an owner's behavior, a staff member's behavior in relation to the owner/service animal, or other concerns that patrons may have about service animals should be forwarded to the Library Director.