

Service Animals and Registration

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June 7, 2024 | 2024-R-0090

Issue

Which animals qualify as service animals under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Connecticut laws protecting their use in public places? Do these laws require the animals to be registered?

This report updates, in part, OLR Issue Brief [2018-R-0199](#). It does not address other related federal laws (e.g., the Fair Housing Act and Air Carrier Access Act). The Office of Legislative Research is not authorized to provide legal opinions and this report should not be considered one.

Summary

Titles II and III of the ADA and comparable Connecticut laws grant certain rights and protections to people with disabilities who use a service animal in specific public places. For example, under ADA regulations, covered businesses and public entities must allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas of their facilities where the public is allowed to go ([28 C.F.R. §§ 35.136 & 36.302](#)). Similarly, Connecticut has two statutes protecting people with disabilities who use service animals in certain places of public accommodation ([CGS §§ 46a-44 & 46a-64](#), as amended by [PA 24-18](#)).

Connecticut's protection statutes and over a dozen other related provisions use the ADA's definition of service animal under legislation passed this year. Among other things, the act also (1) increases the accumulated paid sick leave time a state employee or quasi-public agency employee may use to take service animal training from 15 to 20 days, (2) establishes a similar allowance for municipal employees, and (3) requires the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities to post a link on its website to educational materials on topics related to service animals, emotional support animals, and therapy animals ([PA 24-18](#)).

Under these laws, a service animal is a dog that has been trained to help a person with a disability by performing work or tasks directly related to the person’s disability, such as helping someone who is blind with navigation. Dogs who only provide emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship are not considered to be service animals. [According to the U.S. Department of Justice](#) (DOJ), the ADA prevents state and local governments from requiring dogs to be specifically certified or registered as service animals, but they can subject service animals to state and local requirements for licensing and vaccination that apply to all dogs. In Connecticut, most dogs must be licensed annually through the town clerk’s office, but service animal owners do not have to pay licensure fees.

Service Animals Defined

Federal ADA Title II and III regulations both define “service animal” as any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks to benefit a person with a disability, as defined in federal law, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. This definition excludes other species of animals. Work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the person’s disability and include the following:

1. assisting people who are blind or have low vision with navigation,
2. alerting people who are deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds,
3. providing non-violent protection or rescue work,
4. pulling a wheelchair,
5. assisting someone during a seizure,
6. alerting people to the presence of allergens,
7. retrieving medicine or other items,
8. providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability to people with mobility disabilities, and
9. helping people with psychiatric and neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive destructive behaviors.

Service animal tasks and work do not include (1) crime deterrent effects of the animal’s presence or (2) providing emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship ([28 C.F.R. §§ 35.104 & 36.104](#)).

(Under these definitions, service animals may only be dogs. However, separate ADA regulations authorize similar use of miniature horses by people with disabilities even though they are technically not considered to be “service animals” (see [28 C.F.R. §§ 35.136 & 36.302](#).)

Connecticut’s laws incorporate the ADA Title II service animal definition by reference. These laws apply to those service animals helping people with an intellectual, physical, mental or learning disability, as defined in state law ([CGS §§ 22-345, 46a-44 & 46a-64](#), as amended by [PA 24-18](#)).

Registration

[According to the DOJ](#), the ADA does not require that service animals be certified as such and, furthermore, covered entities may not require documentation (e.g., proof the animal has been trained) as a condition for entry. The department also states that the ADA does not allow mandatory registration of service animals, but that service animals are subject to the same licensing and vaccination rules that apply to all dogs. Local governments and other entities may offer voluntary service animal registries that serve a public purpose (e.g., letting emergency staff know to look for a service animal during an evacuation process or offering discounted licensure fees for people with disabilities).

In Connecticut, on or before June 30 annually, each owner or keeper of a dog must license it in the town clerk’s office in the town where the owner or keeper keeps the dog (except for dogs kept under a kennel license or dogs that are under six months old) and pay associated fees. Those who fail to do so are subject to penalties ([CGS §§ 22-338 & -340](#)). State law requires service animal owners to comply with this licensure requirement but exempts them from paying fees ([CGS § 22-345](#), as amended by [PA 24-18](#)).

Additional Resources

Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, “[Service and Emotional Support Animals, Mental Health Issues, and Housing](#),” October 28, 2021.

Congressional Research Service, “[Snakes on a Plane, in an Apartment, or at the Supermarket? Assistance Animals Under Three Federal Statutes](#),” October 10, 2023.

Connecticut Judicial Branch, “[Connecticut Law About Service Animals and the ADA](#),” Undated.

U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, “[Frequently Asked Questions About Service Animals and the ADA](#),” February 28, 2020.

U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, “[Service Animals](#),” Undated.

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