

Augusta University

Policy Library

Service and Assistive/Comfort Animal (For Students)

Policy Owner: Student Affairs

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy establishes the different requirements between the uses of assistive (comfort) animals and service animals for students with disabilities. It is necessary because assistive 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 in places where members of the public are allowed.

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.

Assistive Animal – Also known as emotional support or comfort animals, assistive animals are animals that provide emotional or other support that ameliorate one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person’s disability. Unlike service animals, assistive 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

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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 trained as a service animal. It should be noted that visitors with service animals are not required to register with Testing and 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. 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.

Assistive Animals (Also known as Support or Comfort Animals)

Unlike service animals, assistive animals are 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, assistive 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 an assistive 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). All students requesting an assistive animal must register with Testing and Disability Services and submit documentation from a licensed physician or mental health professional that meets the assistive animal documentation criteria, 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 assistive 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 assistive 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 assistive animal accompany them to other campus areas. Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis, consistent with applicable laws and processes normally followed for reasonable accommodations.

In general, only domesticated animals or a type commonly kept in households are eligible to serve as assistive animals. Reptiles (other than turtles), barnyard animals, monkeys, kangaroos, and other non-domesticated animals are not considered common household animals. Although an “exotic species” could qualify as an assistive animal, the student seeking accommodation has the substantial burden to demonstrate a disability-related need for the specific exotic animal or the specific type of exotic animal.

If it is determined that the documentation provided by the student provides reliable support for the accommodation request, but the proposed animal or type of animal is deemed unreasonable, the student will be provided an interactive process to determine if there are alternative accommodations that might effectively meet the student’s disability-related needs. This interactive process may include a staff member from Testing and Disability Services and a staff member from Housing and Residence Life.

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. Each animal must wear a collar, leash, or other appropriate apparel or device that identifies the animal with the accredited school for which the animal is being raised, and the handler must have available for inspection credentials from the accredited school for which the animal is being raised.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITES USING SERVICE OR COMFORT ANIMALS

Augusta University is not responsible for the care or supervision of service or assistive 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
- Responsible for any damages created by the animal.

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 assistive 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 through an interactive process.

As previously noted, assistive animals are 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:

- A. It is out of control and effective action is not taken to control it;

- B. It is not housebroken (or in the case of an assistive 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
- C. 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 assistive 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 assistive animal should be made in writing to Testing and Disability Services. A committee will be convened to make appropriate decisions regarding the service or assistive animal, based on all of the information available, and consistent with items 1-4 and A-C above. Testing and Disability Services will issue a written decision to the complainant.

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 Accommodating Students with Disabilities.

Restriction or Removal

In the event that restriction or removal of a service or assistive animal is determined to be necessary, the student with a disability will be given the opportunity to participate in the service, program, or activity without having the animal present. For students living in Housing, the student is responsible to fulfil the current Housing Contract for the remainder of the term of the contract.

When removal is deemed necessary, the student will be notified in writing that removal of the assistive animal is required. The student will be given a specified, reasonable amount of time to make alternative arrangements for the assistive animal. If the student fails to remove the assistive animal within the designated time frame, the institution may remove the animal and relinquish it to a local animal shelter.

The student will be notified in writing that the decision may be appealed to the Office of the Dean of Students. The student may appeal the decision within five (5) business days, from the date on the decision letter. The Dean of Students or his/her designee will review the appeal and make a final decision. The student will be notified in writing of the appeal. Decisions by the Office of the Dean of Students are considered final institutional decisions.

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 and Urban Development Assistance Animal regulations

[Assistance Animals | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#)

US Department of Housing Assistance Animal Assistance Animals Fact Sheet

[AsstAnimalsGuidFS1-24-20.pdf \(hud.gov\)](#)

RELATED POLICIES

[Accommodating Students with Disabilities](#)

APPROVED BY:

Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Augusta University

Date: 5/3/2023

President, Augusta University

Date: 5/3/2023