

# Service Animals and Airline Travel

**Under the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) a service animal means a dog, regardless of breed or type, that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of a qualified individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.** Animal species other than dogs, emotional support animals, comfort animals, companion animals, and service animals in training are not service animals.

## Things to Know

Which service animal species are airlines required to recognize and transport?

- Airlines are required to recognize dogs as service animals and accept them for transport on flights to, within and from the United States. Airlines, though not required, are free to transport other species for passengers if they choose to do so

Under what circumstances may airlines deny transport to a service dog?

- Airlines are permitted to deny transport to a service dog if it:
  - Violates safety requirements - e.g., too large or heavy to be accommodated in the cabin;
  - Poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others;
  - Causes a significant disruption in the cabin or at airport gate areas; or
  - Violates health requirements - e.g., prohibited from entering a U.S. territory or foreign country.
- Airlines may also deny transport to a service dog if the airline requires completed DOT service animal forms and the service animal user does not provide the airline these forms.

How do airlines determine whether an animal is a service animal?

- Airlines can determine whether an animal is a service animal or pet by:
  - Asking an individual with a disability if the animal is required to accompany the passenger because of a disability and what work or task the animal has been trained to perform;

- Looking for physical indicators such as the presence of a harness or vests;
- Looking to see if the animal is harnessed, leashed, or otherwise tethered; and
- Observing the behavior of the animal.

What kind of documentation can be required of persons traveling with service animals?

- Airlines may require:
  - (1) [a U.S. DOT form attesting to the animal's health, behavior, and training](#) ; and
  - (2) [a U.S. DOT form attesting that the animal can either not relieve itself or can relieve itself in a sanitary manner, if the animal will be on a flight that is 8 or more hours.](#)
- Airlines are not permitted to require other documentation from service animal users except to comply with requirements on transport of animals by a Federal agency, a U.S. territory, or a foreign jurisdiction.

## **Tips for Traveling with a Service Animal**

At the airport

- If your service animal needs to relieve itself, please ask an airport or airline professional for the location of the nearest service animal relief areas.

Onboard the aircraft

- Your service animal must be permitted to accompany you in the space under the seat in front of you.
- Certain small service animals may be permitted to sit on your lap if it can be done so safely.
- Your service animal cannot block a space that must remain unobstructed for safety reasons (ex. an aisle or access to an emergency exit).
- An airline is not required to upgrade you to a different class of service to accommodate your service animal.
- Airlines cannot refuse to allow your service animal on board because it makes other passengers or flight crew uncomfortable.
- Your service animal must behave properly. An animal that engages in disruptive behavior (ex. barking or snarling, running around, and/or jumping

onto other passengers, etc. without being provoked) will not be accepted as a service animal.

### Traveling outside of the United States?

Here are a few things to keep in mind if you're planning to fly outside of the United States with your service animal.

- U.S. airlines traveling to foreign countries are subject to the requirements of that foreign country regarding the acceptance of service animals; not all countries permit service animals from other foreign countries.
- Check to ensure whether your destination country permits your animal and any other requirements to enter and exit legally.

### Encounter A Problem?

- If you believe your rights under the Air Carrier Access Act are being or have been violated, ask to speak with a Complaints Resolution Official (CRO). A CRO is the airline's expert on disability accommodation issues. Airlines are required to make one available to you, at no cost, in person at the airport or by telephone during the times they are operating.



**File a Consumer Complaint**

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