



YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

AS A SERVICE DOG HANDLER

Disclaimer: This guide is for **educational and informational purposes only**. It is not legal advice and does not create an attorney-client relationship. I am not a lawyer. Laws can vary by state and change over time. For specific legal questions or situations, please consult a qualified attorney or refer directly to the official U.S. Department of Justice resources.

This guide is everything I wish someone had handed me 18 years ago. It is not complicated. It is not a sales pitch. It is simply the truth about what the law says you can expect — and what you must do in return.

YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS UNDER THE ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects you nationwide in almost every place open to the public: stores, restaurants, hotels, doctors' offices, parks, taxis, buses, trains, and more.

Official DOJ pages (bookmark these — they are clear and easy to read):

- <https://www.ada.gov/topics/service-animals/>
- <https://www.ada.gov/resources/service-animals-faqs/>
- <https://www.ada.gov/resources/service-animals-2010-requirements/>

WHAT THE LAW GUARANTEES YOU:

- Your service dog must be allowed to go with you into **any** area the public is allowed.
- No one can charge you extra fees or make you sit in a special area.
- Businesses and governments can ask **only two questions** (if it is not obvious your dog is working):
 - 1. Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
 - 2. What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?
- They **cannot** ask about your disability, demand papers, certification, or proof of training.
- They **cannot** make you demonstrate the tasks.
- No vest, harness, or ID tag is required by law (though many of us use them for our dog's safety and focus).

Important note: Emotional support animals and pets are **not** protected for public access under the ADA. Only dogs (and in very rare cases miniature horses) trained to perform specific tasks for a disability qualify.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A HANDLER

With rights come responsibilities. The law is very clear on this, and I have learned the hard way that doing these things right protects every handler who comes after us.

You must:

- Keep your dog **under control at all times** (harness, leash, or voice/signal if your disability prevents using a leash).
- Clean up **every** accident immediately. Carry wipes, enzyme spray, and bags — I never leave home without them.
- Make sure your dog is **not disruptive** — no barking, whining, wandering, greeting people, or drawing attention. A real service dog tucks under the table or chair and stays focused on you.
- Take full care of your dog (feeding, grooming, toileting, vet care). No one else is responsible for that.
- Be honest about your dog's training. If your dog cannot reliably do at least two specific tasks that help with your disability (my personal Rule of Two), it is not ready for full public access.

QUICK REMINDERS FROM SOMEONE WHO LIVES THIS

- Invisible disabilities are real. I look fine most days, but the threat is always there. Never feel you have to explain or prove yourself.
- There is no national registry or official certification. Most online "registration" sites are scams.
- Protection, guarding, or bite work is **never** a service dog task. Service dogs do not bite or threaten anyone.

THE TWO GOLDEN RULES I LIVE BY

1. **My dog cannot be disruptive.** If it is, I remove it immediately.
2. **I clean up every accident.** No exceptions, no excuses.

If you follow these, you protect your own rights and the rights of every other handler who needs their dog to live freely.

BOTTOM LINE

You have the right to go where you need to go with your working partner. You also have the responsibility to make sure your team represents the best of what service dogs can be — calm, focused, and under control. When we all do this right, businesses stay welcoming and the real heroes (our dogs) get to keep doing their jobs.

If you ever have questions or run into trouble, my site is here. I'm not here to judge — I'm here to help good handlers stay strong.

**Strength stands watch.
And so do I.**

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