



## SERVICE DOGS:

### *A BUSINESS OWNER'S GUIDE TO THE LAW*

This guide provides the legal clarity you need to handle service animal interactions with confidence, protecting your business while supporting legitimate handlers.

#### 1. THE FEDERAL BASELINE (ADA)

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, a service dog is individually trained to do work or tasks directly related to a person's disability.

- **Access:** Service dogs must be allowed in all areas open to the public (restaurants, hotels, stores, etc.).
- **Species:** Only dogs and, in rare cases, miniature horses qualify.
- **Documentation:** No vest, ID card, or "registration" is legally required. Most online "registrations" are scams; there is no official national registry.

#### 2. THE ONLY TWO QUESTIONS YOU MAY ASK

If it is not obvious the dog is working, you are legally permitted to ask only:

1. Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
2. What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

##### **Strict Prohibitions:**

- ✗ DO NOT ask about the person's specific medical condition or disability.
- ✗ DO NOT demand "papers," certification, or proof of training.
- ✗ DO NOT ask the handler to demonstrate the dog's task.

#### 3. IDENTIFYING THE REAL VS. THE FAKE

**Invisible Disabilities:** Not all disabilities are visible. A handler may look healthy but rely on a dog for life-threatening allergies (like corn protein), seizure alerts, or spinal injuries.

##### **Red Flags (Not Service Dogs):**

- **Confinement:** A dog in a stroller, shopping cart, crate, or carrier at a table is not a service dog. They cannot perform tasks while confined.
- **ESAs:** Emotional Support Animals provide comfort but do not perform specific trained tasks. They are **not** protected for public access under the ADA.
- **Misconduct:** In Texas, misrepresenting a pet as a service animal is a misdemeanor punishable by fines up to \$1,000 and community service.

#### 4. THE TWO GOLDEN RULES FOR HANDLERS

You have the right to ask a handler to leave if they violate these standards:

- 1. No Disruptions:** The dog must be under control, tucked under a table or chair, and focused. It cannot wander, bark, whine, or visit other customers.
- 2. Sanitation:** The handler is 100% responsible for cleaning up any “accidents” immediately.

#### 5. SUMMARY FOR STAFF

- **Be Polite:** Ask the two questions professionally.
- **Control is Mandatory:** If a dog is out of control and the handler does not take effective action, you may ask them to remove the animal.
- **Allergies/Fear:** Being afraid of dogs or having allergies is **not** a legal reason to deny access.

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

Wendi Coffman-Porter • Author & Professional K9 Trainer • Full resources and state-specific laws: [furpower.org](http://furpower.org)