

SERVICE ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

The Board recognizes that service animals may be used to provide assistance to some persons with disabilities. This policy governs the presence of service animals in the schools, on school property, including school buses, and at school activities.

DEFINITION

As applied to schools, federal and Maine Law define a “service animal” as a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual or other mental disability. Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals for the purpose of this definition.

Miniature horses are not defined as service animals under state or federal law. However, miniature horses which have been individually trained to perform specific work or tasks may be permitted in the schools in certain circumstances as a reasonable accommodation for a qualified individual with a disability. Any such requests should be directed to the building administrator for consideration. If a miniature horse is approved, all the conditions in the policy shall apply.

The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the individual’s disability. Examples of such work or tasks include, but are not limited to, assisting an individual who is totally or partially blind with navigation and other tasks, alerting an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds, providing nonviolent protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, assisting an individual during a seizure, alerting an individual to the presence of allergens, retrieving items such as medicine or a telephone, providing physical support and assistance with balance and stability to an individual with a mobility disability and helping a person with a psychiatric or neurological disability by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors.

The crime deterrent effects of an animal’s presence and the provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort or companionship do not constitute work or tasks for the purposes of this definition.

USE OF SERVICE ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

Use of a service animal by a qualified student with a disability will be allowed in school when it is determined that the student’s disability requires such use in order to have equal access to the instructional program, school services and/or school activities.

Use of a service animal by a qualified employee with a disability will be allowed when such use is necessary to enable the employee to perform the essential functions of his/her job or to enjoy benefits of employment comparable to those of similarly situated non-disabled employees.

The parent/guardian of a student who believes the student needs to bring a service animal to school, or an employee who wishes to bring a service animal to school, must submit a written request to the building principal. The building principal, in consultation with the Section 504 Coordinator or Director of Special Services, as appropriate, and the Superintendent will determine whether or not to permit the service animal in school.

Before a service animal shall be permitted in school or on school property, the student's parent or the employee must provide:

- A.** A description of the function(s) the service animal is expected to perform in assisting the person with a disability;
- B.** Documentation of liability insurance;
- C.** A copy of the animal's current license and tag identifying it as a service animal (if applicable);

[NOTE: 7 M.R.S.A. § 3922(4) requires written evidence that a dog meets the definition of "service dog" (with "written evidence" meaning a service dog certification form approved by the Maine Department of Agriculture) in order to register or license a service dog for the first time in a municipality and obtain the tag that identifies the animal as a service dog.]

- D.** Current certification from a veterinarian that the animal is in good health;
- E.** Proof of current rabies vaccination;
- F.** Certification of the service animal's training by a recognized agency or organization and/or demonstration of training; and
- G.** Evidence that the student or employee can appropriately supervise, care for, and control the animal at school, or, depending upon the circumstances involved, that there is a plan for some other person, other than school unit staff, to be present to care for and control the animal.
- H.** It is the responsibility of the student's parents or employee to provide updated information requested in A-G annually.

Parents or animal handlers who will be present in school for the purpose of assisting a student with his/her service animal will be required to submit to a sex offender registry and criminal background check. In addition, parents and handlers must comply with all standards of conduct that apply to school employees and volunteers.

The school unit may impose additional conditions on the presence of a service animal, depending upon the circumstances.

The building principal may remove or exclude a service animal from the school or school property if:

- A.** The presence of the animal poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others;
- B.** The animal significantly disrupts or interferes with the instruction program, school activities, or student learning;

- C. The presence of the animal would require a fundamental alteration of any school program;
- D. The student, employee or handler is unable to fully control the animal;
- E. The student, employee or handler fails to appropriately care for the animal, including feeding, exercising, taking outside for performance of excretory functions, and cleaning up;
- F. The parents or employee fails to provide and maintain the required documentation; and
- G. The animal fails to consistently perform the function(s)/service(s) for which it has been trained and brought to school.

A parent or employee whose service animal has been removed or excluded may appeal the decision to the Superintendent. If dissatisfied with the Superintendent's decision, the parent or employee may appeal to the Board.

SERVICE ANIMALS AT SCHOOL-SPONSORED EVENTS

Individuals with disabilities may be accompanied by their service animals to events or activities open to the public that are held in schools or on school property. The use of a service animal may not be conditioned on the payment of a fee or security deposit, but the individual is liable for any damage done to the premises or facilities by such an animal.

The building administrator may revoke or exclude the service animal only if the animal poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others, the use of the animal would result in substantial physical damage to the property of others, or would substantially interfere with the reasonable enjoyment of the event or activity by others.

Legal Reference: *42 USC § 12101 et seq.*
 36 CFR § 104, 302
 5 MRSA §§ 4553, 4592
 Me. Human Rights Commission Rule Chapter 7

Cross References *AC - Nondiscrimination, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action*
 IMG - Animals in Schools

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