

APDT POSITION STATEMENT SERVICE ANIMALS

The Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) defines “service animal” as “any 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.”ⁱ

The APDT supports this definition of “service animal,” including the requirements that the individual have a disability recognized under the ADA and that the dog be trained to work or perform tasks directly related to that disability. We also support the Department of Justice (“DOJ”) decision to limit “service animals” to dogs, and in some cases miniature horses.

We advocate for the careful selection of service animals, and urge that service animals be provided humane and responsible care throughout the animals’ working life and into retirement.

The APDT applauds the DOJ’s refusal to impose breed restrictions on service dogs. However, we note that at times some dogs may be inappropriate for certain tasks. For example, a small breed dog is not an appropriate candidate for mobility and stability assistance. The APDT also commends the DOJ for its focus on the individual animal and circumstances, requiring that the animal be under control and calm while working, and allowing exclusion of an animal for issues such as aggression and soiling.

We agree with the DOJ’s refusal to impose requirements regarding sourcing, training, and documentation that may have the unintended consequence of restricting access to service animals. However, the APDT finds great value in private organizations setting standards for their specific organization, which may also serve to guide others in training service animals. Additionally, while we agree that the law should not impose specific training and certification requirements for service animals, the APDT strongly encourages individuals to work with a professional trainer who is knowledgeable and experienced with service animal training. In keeping with APDT’s Code of Ethics for companion dogs, APDT supports the use of humane methods, using a Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (“LIMA”) approach, to train service animals.

The APDT agrees that service animals should be granted broad access in our society, in contrast with emotional support animals, who are not required to be trained to perform tasks related to a disability. While emotional support animals can serve a crucial purpose in housing and transportation settings, those animals should not have the same broad level of access as service animals.

The APDT supports penalizing and/or criminalizing an individual who fraudulently represents that an animal is a service animal. We also maintain that trainers have a higher ethical obligation to avoid making such a fraudulent representation, or encouraging or aiding others to do so.

Adopted: August 1, 2017

Revised: March 12, 2019

ⁱ Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-336, §35.104 and §36.104, 104 Stat. 328 (1990).