

Change in Washington Law about Service Animals Starting January 1, 2019

Intro

The state legislature has found that misrepresentations of pets, therapy animals, or emotional support animals as service animals has made it harder for people with disabilities to get acceptance of their properly trained and essential service animals.

What does the new law do?

It

- Limits the definition of “service animal”
- Imposes a fine for misrepresenting an animal as a service animal

What is a “service animal”?

The definition includes only

- dogs and miniature horses
- individually trained to do work or perform tasks directly related to their owner’s disability

[RCW 49.60.040 \(24\)](#).

Does this include emotional support animals?

No.

What kinds of work do service animals do?

Some examples include

- guiding an owner who is blind or has low vision
- pulling a wheelchair
- assisting during a seizure
- detecting allergens
- fetching medication or the phone

What is a place of public accommodation?

Restaurants, stores, hotels, and so on. The longer list is at [RCW 49.60.040\(2\)](#).

How will the law work in real life?

If a service animal’s trained purpose is not apparent, a place of public accommodation or a police officer can ask:

- Do you need the animal because of a disability?
- What work or task has it been trained to perform?

They cannot ask for

- a demonstration of the animal’s training
- proof that it is a service animal

What happens if someone misrepresents an animal as a service animal?

The person may have to

- pay a \$500 fine ([RCW 7.80.120](#))
- remove the animal from the premises

This is also true of someone who refuses to answer the questions asked of them in situations described in “How will the law work in real life,” above.

[RCW 49.60.214.](#)

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