



GENERAL INFORMATION FOR LANDLORD REGARDING ASSISTANCE ANIMALS

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In the event you receive a reasonable accommodation request for an assistance animal, the following information may assist you in handling and evaluating such a request.

THE FAIR HOUSING ACT.

General. The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, and disability (handicap).

Exemptions. The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in most types of housing, but there are exemptions. In some circumstances, the Act exempts:

- **Owner-occupied buildings with no more than four units.** Rooms or units in dwellings containing living quarters occupied or intended to be occupied by no more than four (4) families living independently of each other, if the owner actually maintains and occupies one of such living quarters as his or her residence;
- **Single-family housing sold or rented without the use of a broker.** The sale or rental of any single-family house by an owner, provided the following conditions are met: (i) the owner does not own or have any interest in more than three single-family houses at any one time;(ii) the house is sold or rented without the use of a real estate broker, agent, or salesperson or the facilities of any person in the business of selling or renting dwellings; and (iii) if the owner selling the house does not reside in it at the time of the sale or was not the most recent resident of the house prior to such sale, the exemption applies only to one such sale in any 24-month period.
- **Housing operated by certain organizations and private clubs that limit occupancy to members.** See 42 U.S.C. 3603, 3607 and 24 C.F.R. § 100.10 for more details.

Enforcement. At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administers and enforces the federal Fair Housing Act. The Fair Housing Act provides that if the state or city has adopted similar fair housing laws, fair housing complaints will be referred to the state or city for enforcement. At the state level, the Texas Workforce Commission, Civil Rights Division, administers and enforces the Texas Fair Housing Act, which is virtually identical to the federal act.

DEFINITIONS.

Assistance Animal. An assistance animal is an animal that works, provides assistance, or performs tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability, or provides emotional support that alleviates one or more identified symptoms or effects of a person's disability. An assistance animal is not considered a pet. Assistance animals include service animals, and emotional support animals. A service animal means any dog that is individually trained to work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability; the work or tasks performed by the service animal must be directly related to the individual's disability. Emotional support animal means other trained or untrained animals that do work, perform tasks, provide assistance, and/or provide therapeutic emotional support for an individual with a disability. An emotional support animal can be an animal commonly kept in the home for pleasure rather than commercial purposes, including, but not limited to: dogs, cats, small birds, rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, fish, turtles, or other small, domesticated animals. Examples of animals not considered common household animals include, but are not limited to: other reptiles, barnyard animals, monkeys, kangaroos, and other non-domesticated animals

Disability. Under the Fair Housing Act, "disability" or "handicap" means a person with physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of a person's major life activities, a record (history) of the impairment, or being regarded as having the impairment.

Major Life Activities. "Major life activities" means functions such as caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION.

Discrimination against a person with a disability includes refusing to make a reasonable accommodation in rules, policies, practices, or services, when such accommodations may be necessary to afford a person with a disability equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.

If you prohibit animals in your rental property or impose other restrictions or conditions related to animals, a reasonable accommodation request may include a request to live with and use an assistance animal.

Generally, such a request must be granted, unless: (i) the person seeking to use and live with the animal does not have a disability; (ii) the person seeking to use and live with the animal does not have a disability-related need for the assistance animal; (iii) the request would impose an undue financial and administrative burden on you; (iv) the request would fundamentally alter the nature of your operations; (v) the specific assistance animal in question poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others that cannot be reduced or eliminated by another reasonable accommodation; or (vi) the specific assistance animal in question would cause substantial physical damage to the property of others that cannot be reduced or eliminated by another reasonable accommodation. If you refuse a requested accommodation for one of these reasons, you should discuss with the person whether there is an alternative reasonable accommodation that would effectively address the person's disability-related needs.

REQUESTING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.

Once a reasonable accommodation request has been made, you may be able to ask for additional information; however, this depends on whether the person's disability or the disability-related need for the assistance animal is readily apparent or known.

- **If the person's disability is obvious, or otherwise known to you, and if the need for the requested accommodation is also readily apparent and known**, then you may not request any additional information about the person's disability or the need for the accommodation.
- **If the person's disability is known or readily apparent, but the need for the accommodation is not readily apparent or known**, you may request only information that is necessary to evaluate the disability-related need for the accommodation. For example, a licensed health care professional with personal knowledge of the individual may provide a note confirming a need for an animal. The health care professionals' services may be delivered remotely, including the over the internet.
- **If a disability is not obvious**, you may request reliable disability-related information that: (i) is necessary to verify that the person meets the Fair Housing Act's definition of disability; (ii) describes the needed accommodation; and (iii) shows the relationship between the person's disability and the need for the requested accommodation.

Information a landlord can request as the basis for supporting a non-observable disability can include: a determination of disability from a governmental authority, the receipt of disability benefits or services (i.e., SSDI, Medicare, or SSI for a person under 65, veteran's benefits, etc.), eligibility for housing assistance or housing vouchers received because of disability; or information confirming disability from a health care professional. You may not ask an applicant or tenant to provide access to medical records or medical providers, or provide detailed or extensive information or documentation of a person's physical or mental impairments.

INTERNET CERTIFICATIONS.

HUD states that websites which sell certificates, registrations, and licensing documents for assistance animals are not sufficient on their own to reliably establish that an individual has a disability-related need for an emotional support animal. Instead, HUD recommends that the documentation should include the patient's name, whether there is a professional relationship between the healthcare professional and the patient, and the type of animal(s) for which the reasonable accommodation is sought. The documentation should also include information addressing the requestor's disability: whether the patient has a physical or mental impairment, whether that impairment substantially limits at least one major life activity or major bodily function, and how the patient will be aided by the animal(s).

