



**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA**  
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**TO:** Virginia Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies  
Regional EMS Councils

**FROM:** Ronald D. Passmore, NRP  
Manager – Regulation & Compliance Division

**SUBJECT:** Guidance Document for transportation of ADA Service Animal

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**Guideline for Transport of a Service Animal**

The purpose of this document is to provide a point of reference and source of information to EMS providers that encounter patients with service animals.

**The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines service animals as “dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.”** Examples of such work or tasks include guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack, or performing other duties.

Service animals are working animals, not pets. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person’s disability. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.



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**Under the ADA, State and local governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations that serve the public generally must allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas where the public is normally allowed to go.** For example, in a hospital it would be inappropriate to exclude a service animal from areas such as patient rooms, clinics, cafeterias, or examination rooms. However, it may be appropriate to exclude a service animal from operating rooms or burn units where the animal's presence may compromise a sterile environment. If we have a patient who claims that they have a disability where he or she require the service animal, we, as providers must accommodate the patient by transporting the patient and the service animal in the ambulance.

When you encounter a patient with a dog and it is not clear that it is a service animal the following questions can be used to guide your decision.

- 1) Is the dog required because of a disability?
- 2) What work or task has the dog been trained to do?
- 3) Is the dog housebroken?

**Do not ask for papers and do not ask for the dog to perform the task that it is trained to do.**

**Under the ADA, service animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the service animal's work or the individual's disability prevents using these devices.** In that case, the individual must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal, or other effective controls. If the dog does not meet these requirements, and is not housebroken or displays vicious behavior, transport can be denied.

The goal is to get the service animal to the hospital by the time the patient arrives. EMS providers are not responsible to furnish accommodations for the dog such as food, water, or other care. If the patient is unconscious, or unable to take care of the needs of the service dog, other arrangements should be made for its' care.

Due to the possibility of other providers and future patients having allergies to dogs, it is important after transport of the patient and service animal to thoroughly decontaminate the ambulance. If the need arises to transport a service dog with a provider or another patient who has allergies, efforts should be made to separate the individual from the dog as much as possible. Utilizing a second transport unit is recommended in these instances.

[https://www.ada.gov/service\\_animals\\_2010.htm](https://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm)