

University of Maine, Student Accessibility Services
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Assistance Animal Policy and Procedures

General Information

The University of Maine recognizes the importance of “Assistance Animals” under the Fair Housing Act that provide physical and/or emotional support to individuals with disabilities. This document is a supplement to the existing “Guidelines Regarding Service Animals” issued in December 2006 and updated in 2012, which can be found at the following link,

http://UMaine.maine.edu/sites/default/files/eoo/Service_Animal_Guidelines_2012.pdf.

This policy applies solely to the specific requirements applicable to an individual’s use of an Assistance Animal in University housing. UMaine housing policies prohibit having animals of any type; however, UMaine will consider a request for a reasonable accommodation to this policy by an individual with a disability. The Student Accessibility Services staff is responsible for implementing this policy and for assisting students with disabilities to document their specific need for an accommodation.

No Assistance Animal may be kept in University housing at any time prior to the individual receiving approval as a reasonable accommodation pursuant to this policy. A request must be initiated by the student registering for disability accommodations with the Student Accessibility Services.

Definition

An “Assistance Animal” (sometimes referred to as emotional support or therapy animal) is a term that the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses to cover any 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. It is typically an animal selected to play an integral part of a person’s treatment process and it is not a pet. The animal must demonstrate a good temperament and reliable, predictable behavior. An assistance animal is prescribed to an individual with a disability by a healthcare or mental health professional. An assistance animal may be incorporated in a treatment process to assist in alleviating the symptoms of that individual’s disability. This treatment occurs within the person’s residence and, therefore, may be considered for access to university housing.

The question in determining if an Assistance Animal will be allowed in University housing is whether or not the Assistance Animal is necessary because of an individual’s disability to afford the individual an equal opportunity to use and enjoy University housing. If it is determined that that animal is necessary for University housing, an Assistance Animal, as defined above, is not permitted in other areas of the University (e.g. dining facilities, libraries, academic buildings, athletic buildings, classrooms, labs, individual centers, etc.).

Evaluation of Assistance Animal Requests

The process for requesting an accommodation of an assistance animal starts with an individual submitting documentation from their doctor/medical professional. Detailed information about what to include in documentation of need for an assistance animal is at the end of this document, but at a minimum the documentation should include the following:

- the nature of the disability and how it substantially impacts a major life activity
- evidence that the animal is necessary to afford an equal opportunity to use and enjoy the residence hall
- the relationship between the disability and the assistance or relief that the animal provides.

Student Accessibility Services will consult with Residence Life in making a determination on whether an assistance animal is a reasonable accommodation. A request for an assistance animal may be denied as unreasonable if the presence of the animal 1) imposes an undue financial or administrative burden; 2) fundamentally alters University housing policy; and/or 3) poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others or would cause substantial property damage to University property. UMaine may consider the following factors, among others, in determining whether the presence of an animal is reasonable or when making housing assignments for individuals with assistance animals:

1. The size of the animal is too large for available assigned housing space;
2. The animal's presence would force another individual from individual housing (e.g. serious allergies)
3. The animal is not housebroken
4. The animal's vaccinations are not up to date
5. The animal poses or has posed in the past a direct threat to the individual or others (e.g. aggressive behavior)
6. The animal causes or has caused excessive damage to housing beyond reasonable wear and tear

UMaine reserves the right to assign an individual with an assistance animal to a single room without a roommate.

If the accommodation of an assistance animal is approved, the housing office will be notified and they will in turn, notify the roommate, floor residents or suitemates where the individual resides. Such information will be limited and will not include specific disability related information. Other residents with medical condition(s) that are affected by animals (respiratory diseases, asthma, severe allergies) will be asked to provide medical documentation identifying their condition. The University will resolve any conflict in a timely manner. Any conflicts could result in a change in room assignment.

A letter of accommodation will be provided to the student verifying the approval of the assistance animal accommodation. This letter will explicitly state that the animal has been approved to accompany the student in his or her residence hall room only. Requests for accommodations beyond the residence hall will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The letter of accommodation will be effective for the academic year and the request will need to be reviewed annually. UMaine reserves the right to request updated documentation as part of this annual review.

SAS Assistance Animal Request Procedure

Step 1: Student reviews Assistance Animal Policy and Procedures document, and submits UMaine SAS assistance animal student request form to officially request an assistance animal as a disability accommodation

Step 2: Student submits documentation from an appropriate clinician to Student Accessibility Services

Step 3: Student meets Disability Support Services professional staff member in person, on phone or via web conference (Google Hangout, Skype)

Step 3: Student Accessibility Services staff reviews requests in consultation with the Office of Residential Life, University Counseling Center, and, if needed, the individual's medical provider. Please note that there is no deadline to submit a request for accommodation for an assistance animal. The length of determination may vary depending on the complexity of the request. Students are encouraged to initiate the process at least four weeks in advance of the date they are requesting to bring an animal to campus.

Step 4: If the assistance animal is approved, student must;

- Provide proof of compliance with licensing and vaccination requirements for the animal
- Meet with disability service staff and confirm an understanding of the guidelines by signing the statement "Responsibility of an Individual with an Assistance Animal in University Housing."

Step 5: If the assistance animal is approved, Student Accessibility Services will notify the housing office who will in turn notify the residents of the floor or suite where the student resides. Such information will be limited and not include specific disability related information. The student will be provided a letter of accommodation that will specifically state that the animal is approved and where the animal is permitted on campus. The student should retain the letter to provide as proof of approval of the accommodation.

Step 6: Student renews request and provides updated emergency contact information annually.

Appeal Process

Students who feel that they been unfairly denied a reasonable accommodation should contact the Office of Equal Opportunity at 207-581-1226.