

Therapy animals are  
service animals too



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Therapy Animals are Service Animals Too Therapy animals come in many varieties. Generally, an animal that acts as a “ comfort animal” is considered a therapy animal. Comfort animals come into nursing homes and hospitals, and are petted and socialized with by the residents. Therapy animals also may be used in active therapy, such as horses that help people learn balance, or dogs that help autistic children learn to socialize with others. These types of animals are not given special rights to access public places, since they are not considered assistance animals. However, some therapy animals provide assistance in the form of alerting of an imminent panic attack or even simply providing emotional support to their owners (SKLOOT). These types of therapy animals should be considered service animals and provided the requisite legal protections that this label guarantees any other service animal. Service animals, according to the Americans with Disabilities Act, include “ any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability.” People traveling with such service animals must be allowed access to any public building without being segregated from other customers and without being required to show any kind of proof of their disability. In fact, these requirements supersede county health requirements that only guide dogs may be permitted into certain businesses (U. S. Department of Justice). The ADA's own definition of service animals is extremely broad. According to the previously cited definition, the animal must only “ provide assistance” to be considered a service animal (U. S. Department of Justice). Assistance can take many forms, including the provision of emotional support for those with psychiatric conditions. The ADA also states that a person cannot be required to state why they need an animal, only that the animal is in fact needed by the

person to perform their day-to-day activities (Skloot). In recent years, the species used for service animals have expanded to horses, monkeys, and even birds. These animals pose no additional health risk to businesses when compared to the traditional standard, the large-breed seeing eye dog, and do not cause additional strain on the businesses who allow them in (Skloot). Many of these animals provide a wider variety of services than are specifically mentioned under the ADA, but they definitely meet the standard of “ providing assistance” that is stated in the wording of the law (U. S. Department of Justice). Psychiatric conditions can be just as disabling as physical conditions. In fact, asking a person with a psychiatric condition to “ prove” their need for an animal, or to leave the animal behind, could actually be more traumatic than asking the same of a person with a physical disability. Many of these “ therapy” animals provide vital support for the people they travel with, helping to keep their owners and the people around them safe (Skloot). Therefore, a therapy animal should in fact be considered a service animal and be allowed to travel with its owner anywhere the owner deems necessary. A therapy animal that provides emotional support may not seem vital to the average individual, but people do not bring therapy animals out with them on a whim. These animals are generally trained and have a close bond with the people they travel with, and leaving them behind can be as damaging as asking someone to leave behind a wheelchair or a pair of eyeglasses. Additionally, business owners have the ability to remove animals from their business if they are disruptive, such as in the case of a seeing-eye dog barking during a movie showing (U. S. Department of Justice). There is no reason to keep out such service animals on the basis that they “ might” be disruptive or unhealthy, an action which would in most cases be outside

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the existing laws, if the business owner has the right to remove the animal when it becomes disruptive. Therapy animals should be allowed in as service animals, and treated the same once they enter the place of business.

References SKLOOT, REBECCA. " Creature Comforts." The New York Times 31 Dec 2008, sec. The Times Magazine. Web. 24 Mar 2011. U. S. Department of Justice. " Commonly Asked Questions About Service Animals in Places of Business". 2008. (14 Jan 2008): U. S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section. 24 Mar 2011. .