
HOUSING: Understanding Your Right to a Support or Assistance Animal

What is the difference between a service animal and a support or assistance animal?

- **Service animals** are typically limited to dogs. They can be taken to places where the public is allowed to go and are trained to perform a specific task, such as guiding a blind person or alerting someone about an oncoming seizure.
- **A support or assistance animal** can be any kind of animal. The animal does not have to be trained, though it can be. A trained service dog may be a support or assistance animal, too. However, an animal doesn't have to be trained for you to have a right to have it in rental housing.
- This publication will focus on the rights people with disabilities have to a support or assistance animal in a rental property only.

What law protects my right to have a support or assistance animal in my rented home?

A person with a disability living in rental housing (including an apartment or house) has rights under a federal law called the Fair Housing Act. That law applies to virtually all rental property, including private landlords. It requires housing providers to grant a tenant's requests for changes in rules, practices or policies to accommodate a person's disability.

What qualifies as a disability under the Fair Housing Act?

A disability is a physical, mental or emotional impairment that severely limits at least one major life activity.

How do I ask for an accommodation to have a support or assistance animal in my rented home?

We recommend making a request for a support or assistance animal in writing, with a

doctor or mental health professional's supporting documentation or written note. That note doesn't have to go into detail about a diagnosis or include medical records. It just needs to say that because of the tenant's disability, he or she needs a support animal.

If you provide this information to your landlord, it is usually illegal for a landlord to deny your request to have a support animal. Keep a copy of anything you send. Landlords are allowed to offer forms for requests, but it isn't clear they can require you to use their form.

Does my animal have to be certified or have special papers?

There is no official registry, certificate or papers for service or support animals. No one can demand that you provide any official certification or require you to pay for any certification.

Can my landlord deny my request to have a support animal if they have a "no pets" rule?

No, "no pets" rules do not apply to support or assistance animals. In addition, landlords may not charge extra deposits or monthly fees, although they can charge for any actual damages caused.

What can I do if my landlord refuses to allow my support animal?

If you believe your landlord is violating your housing rights, you can file a complaint with the following agencies:

OHIO CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION (OCRC)

Phone: 888-278-7101

Website: crc.ohio.gov

Timeframe to file: Within one year

OCRC has offices all over Ohio and can help you complete a charge form. You can also start the process of filing a charge online, and then OCRC will send it to you to sign it, have it notarized, and return it to them.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD)

Phone: 800-669-9777

TTY: 800-927-9275

Website: hud.gov

Timeframe to file: Within one year

HUD has many ways you can file a charge, including online, by email, by phone and by mail. You can find more details at https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/online-complaint.

Disability Rights Ohio can also help if you feel like someone has discriminated against you because of your disability. Call 800-292-9181, and select option 2 for the intake department. You can also fill out an online intake form at disabilityrightsohio.org/intake-form.