Service Dogs: ADA Requirements & Protections

A plain-language summary of federal ADA rules and Michigan law

Prepared by Autumns 24k Goldens · November 5, 2026

What Counts as a Service Dog Under the ADA

- A **dog individually trained to do work or perform tasks** for a person with a disability. The task must be trained behavior tied to the disability — for example guiding, alerting to sounds or seizures, retrieving items, balance and mobility support, or psychiatric tasks such as interrupting anxiety episodes.
- **Emotional support alone does not qualify.** A dog whose mere presence provides comfort is an emotional support animal, not a service dog, and has no ADA public-access rights.
- The ADA has no breed or size restrictions.

No Paperwork, Certification, or Vest Is Required

- The ADA does **not** require certification, registration, an ID card, a vest, or professional training. A person may train their own dog.
- No business may demand documents, ask about the person's disability, or ask the dog to demonstrate its task. "Official ADA registration" sold online is not something the law recognizes.

Public Access Protections

- Service dogs may go **anywhere the public may go** — restaurants, stores, hotels, hospitals, schools — including places that serve food and places with "no pets" policies.
- When a dog's role is not obvious, staff may ask **only two questions**: (1) "Is this a service animal required because of a disability?" and (2) "What work or task has

the dog been trained to perform?"
- Allergies or fear of dogs on the part of other customers or staff are **not** legal grounds to refuse a service dog.

When a Dog May Be Removed, and Handler Duties

- A dog may be asked to leave **only** if it is out of control and the handler does not take effective action, or it is not housebroken. The person must still be offered service without the dog.
- The dog must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered unless that interferes with its work, in which case voice or signal control is allowed.
- The handler is responsible for the dog's care and for any damage it causes. No pet fees or deposits may be charged (hotels included), though damage charges apply as they would to any guest.

Where Different Rules Apply

- **Housing** is governed by the Fair Housing Act, which is broader: it covers "assistance animals," including emotional support animals, under different documentation rules.
- **Air travel** changed in 2021: airlines now recognize only trained service dogs, may require the U.S. Department of Transportation attestation form, and treat emotional support animals as pets.
- **Employment** falls under a different part of the ADA and is handled as a case-by-case reasonable accommodation.

Michigan Law

- Michigan law (MCL 750.502c) mirrors the ADA and, since a 2022 update, also extends public-access rights to **service dogs in training** accompanied by a trainer or raiser. The same two-question limit applies to Michigan businesses, and denying access to a legitimate service dog handler is a misdemeanor.

- **Faking it is a crime in Michigan:** falsely representing a pet as a service animal (or one in training) in a public place is a misdemeanor (MCL 752.62) — up to 90 days in jail, a fine of up to $500, and/or up to 30 days of community service.
- Michigan also offers a **voluntary** service animal identification program through the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. It is optional — it is not required for access.

Resources Used

- U.S. Department of Justice, "ADA Requirements: Service Animals," ADA.gov — the official federal guidance this summary is based on.
  `https://www.ada.gov/resources/service-animals-2010-requirements/`

- Michigan Penal Code, MCL 750.502c — Michigan's public-accommodation service animal statute (full text).
  `https://law.onecle.com/michigan/chapter-750/750.502c.html`

- "Michigan Service Dog Laws: Rights, Access & Protections," usaservicedogs.org — Michigan statutes, the two-question rule, and the MCL 752.62 fraud penalty.
  `https://usaservicedogs.org/blog/michigan-service-dog-laws-complete-guide`

- "Service Dog Laws and Rights in Michigan," Assistance Dog Partners.
  `https://www.assistancedogpartners.org/blogs/service-dog-laws-and-rights-in-michigan`

- "Service Dog Laws in Michigan: What Handlers, Businesses, and Landlords Need to Know," animalofthings.com — including Michigan's voluntary ID program and penalty table.
  `https://animalofthings.com/service-dog-laws-in-michigan/`

This handout is a plain-language summary for general information only, not legal advice. For the official text, see ADA.gov and the Michigan Legislature.