



Service Dogs and Public Accommodations:

What Food Establishments Need to Know



Under [Rhode Island law](#) and the national [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), individuals with disabilities have the right to bring service animals into various public places, including restaurants and grocery stores. These laws ensure that people with disabilities can enjoy the same access to public spaces as everyone else.



Per the ADA, service animals are defined as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.



When someone enters your establishment with a service animal, you and your employees may ask only two (2) specific questions:

- Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
- What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?



You and your employees are **NOT** allowed to request any documentation for the dog, require that the dog demonstrate its task, or inquire about the nature of the person's disability.

Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do NOT qualify as service animals under the ADA. You and your employees are not required by law to allow comfort or emotional support animals into your establishment.

Per the [Rhode Island Food Code](#), service animals controlled by a disabled employee or person are permitted in areas that are not used for food preparation and that are usually open to customers, such as indoor and outdoor dining and sales areas. Service animals are only allowed in these spaces if a health or safety hazard will not result from the presence or activities of the service animal.

A food establishment with an outdoor dining area may allow a patron's non-service dog to accompany the patron in the outdoor dining area during the hours designated by the owner of the restaurant. [R.I.G.L. § 21-27-12](#) requirements must be followed.

The Rhode Island Department of Health receives many questions about service animals. When creating or updating policies, please visit the [ADA's Frequently Asked Questions page](#) for guidance.

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