

VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Student Accessibility Office



**Service Animal & Emotional Support Animal
Policy and Procedures**

Effective December 2025
Updated March 2026

Service Animal & Emotional Support Animal Policy and Procedures

Purpose

Virginia State University (VSU) is committed to ensuring equal access to academic programs, housing, and campus services for students with disabilities. This comprehensive policy outlines the requirements, expectations, responsibilities, and procedures related to the presence of Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals on campus.

Requests are reviewed individually to determine reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504, and the Fair Housing Act (FHA).

Policy Statement

VSU prohibits animals in campus facilities, residences, and public spaces except for:

1. Service Animals covered under ADA regulations.
2. Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) approved through the Student Accessibility Office (SAO).

ESAs are not considered Service Animals and are only permitted in assigned student housing after formal approval. VSU evaluates each ESA request through an individualized assessment to ensure the accommodation is necessary and reasonable within the residential community.

Institutional Limits & Restrictions

- Emotional Support Animal and Sizing Considerations:
 - Only **one** ESA is permitted to be approved per student
 - The ESA's size and equipment must not obstruct room use, sanitation, required safety pathways, or community living standards.
- Breed/Species Considerations:
 - VSU reserves the right to deny specific animals based on species, breed, temperament, or safety concerns.
 - Only domesticated animals are permitted for consideration as an ESA in university housing.
- Decisions are based on objective evidence and an individualized assessment and may consider:
 - Safety risks
 - Building characteristics
 - Community impact

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- Local/state regulations

Procedures for Notification of a Service Animal

Service Animals are permitted across campus with appropriate university notification.

Students must:

1. Contact the Student Accessibility Office to inform of the service animal on campus.
2. Provide verification documentation of service animal
3. Submit all required documents: photo, vaccination records, emergency contacts for animals residing in university housing

Required Documentation for Service Animals.

All documentation must be submitted to sao@vsu.edu.

Required:

1. Documentation confirming the animals service animal status.
2. Clear, recent, individual, color photograph of the animal.
3. Updated vaccination records, for animals residing in university housing.
4. Two emergency contacts able to remove the animal within 3 hours if needed.

Procedures to Apply for an Emotional Support Animal

Students must:

1. Submit an official accommodation request to the SAO.
2. Submit official documentation from a licensed healthcare provider verifying that the Emotional Support Animal is essential to mitigate or alleviate symptoms associated with a documented disability.
3. Submit all required documents
4. Meet with SAO to review responsibilities and expectations.

Timeline:

- It is recommended that requests are submitted at least 60 days before move-in.
- Review may take up to 30 calendar days, excluding university closures, once all documents are received.

Emotional Support Animals Agreement:

- Approved students must sign the ESA Housing Agreement prior to animal placement.

Annual Renewal:

- ESA approvals are not automatic and must be renewed each academic year.

Required Documentation for Emotional Support Animals

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All documentation must be submitted to sao@vsu.edu and approved before any animal is brought to campus.

Required:

1. Veterinarian Assessment (within 90 days) including species, breed, temperament, and health.
2. Clear, individual, recent color photograph of the animal.
3. Updated vaccination and licensing records, including Chesterfield County lifetime dog license for dogs.
4. Two emergency contacts able to remove the ESA within 3 hours, if needed.

Emotional Support Animal Housing Restrictions

Emotional Support Animals are:

- Allowed only in the student's assigned housing unit.
- Allowed only outdoors for relief
- Permitted to exercise/walk outside of university gates

Emotional Support Animals are NOT permitted in:

- Classrooms
- Academic buildings
- Dining halls
- Libraries
- Gyms
- Lounges/Study Rooms
- Labs
- Offices
- Events or campus transportation
- Lobbies
- Recreation Rooms

Revocation of ESA Approval

VSU may revoke approval if:

- The animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others that cannot be reduced or eliminated through reasonable modifications.
- The animal's behavior, size, or care requirements prevent it from being reasonably accommodated in the assigned residential space without compromising safety, sanitation, or room functionality.
- The animal's species is one that the university cannot reasonably accommodate due to documented safety, legal, or facility-based limitations.
- Required disability-related documentation is incomplete, inaccurate, or not provided.
- The handler fails to meet required care, control, sanitation, or responsibility standards.
- The animal causes significant property damage that cannot be reasonably mitigated.

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- The animal or its conditions fundamentally alter University housing operations.

All decisions are based on individualized assessment and objective evidence provided by the recommendation of the Director of Residence Life. If ESA approval is revoked, the handler will have 72 hours from the time of notification to remove the animal from university premises. Decisions to revoke ESA approval are final and cannot be appealed.

Students whose ESA approval has been revoked may reapply for consideration during the next academic year.

General Handler Responsibilities

Handlers must:

- Maintain full control of the animal at all times using a leash, harness, or effective voice control.
- Keep the animal housebroken and well-behaved.
- Ensure the animal does not disrupt campus operations (barking, odors, aggression, damage).
- Clean waste immediately and maintain sanitary conditions.
- Provide adequate food, water, vet care, and shelter.
- Not leave the animal unattended except for short, reasonable periods in their housing.
- Not tether the animal to campus property.
- Assume all financial responsibility for damage caused by the animal.

Failure to comply may result in the animal's removal at the owner's expense.

References:

[Policies - HR | Virginia State University](#)

[vsu-reslife-community-living-guide-2024-25.pdf](#)

Contact Information

Student Accessibility Office (SAO)
Memorial Hall – First Floor
Phone: 804-524-5061
Email: sao@vsu.edu

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Definitions

Designated Areas: Approved animals are allowed in a handler's dorm room only, unless the animal is performing a task they have been trained to complete for the handler. Handlers are permitted to exercise/walk their service animal outside the university gates and are responsible for the cleanliness of their animal.

Disability: A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Domesticated: The state of Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) classifies certain species as "domestic animals" under administrative code 4VAC15-20-50. For the purposes of this policy, "domesticated" refers to species recognized under Virginia law as traditional household pets, such as dogs, cats, and certain small mammals (e.g., hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits).

Emotional Support Animal (ESA): An animal that alleviates symptoms of a disability through emotional or therapeutic support but is not trained to perform specific tasks. ESAs are allowed only in campus housing following approval.

Handler/Owner: The student who has been approved for the animal and is responsible for all care, behavior, and compliance.

Housebroken: An animal trained to defecate in a specific location or outside.

Pets: Animals that do not perform a specific task or provide documented comfort/therapy to a person with a disability/impairment.

Reliable Third-Party Documentation: Verification from a qualified medical or mental health provider who knows the student and can confirm the disability-related need for an ESA.

Service Animal: A dog (or miniature horse) trained to perform tasks that assist an individual with a disability. Service Animals are permitted anywhere students are permitted, except in restricted sterile environments.

Student Accessibility Office (SAO): The office that is tasked with managing student requests for accommodations.