

Aquinas College Service and Assistance Animal Policies

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the Fair Housing Act (FHA), Aquinas College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities requiring a service animal or an assistance animal (commonly referred to as an emotional support animal or ESA).

Definition of a Service Animal

Under ADA, a public accommodation shall modify policies, practices, or procedures to permit the use of service animals by an individual with a disability. ADA defines a service animal as a dog individually trained to work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. Other species of animals, whether trained or untrained, are not considered service animals (with the exception of miniature horses). The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the handler's disability. Examples of work or tasks include, but are not limited to: assisting individuals who are blind or have low vision with navigation and other tasks, alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds, pulling a wheelchair, assisting during a seizure, alerting to the presence of allergens, and preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors.

Inquiries Regarding Service Animals

When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, the College is able to make the following inquiries:

1. Is the dog required because of a disability?
2. What work or tasks has the dog been trained to perform?

Responsibilities of the Student with the Service Animal: The service animal must be under the control of its handler. A harness, leash, or other tether must be used unless the handler is unable because of the disability to use a harness, leash, or other tether, or if the use of a harness, leash, or other tether interferes with the service

animal's safe, effective performance of the work or task. In such cases, the service animal must remain under the student's control, such as voice control.

The student must provide care and supervision of the service animal. The College is not responsible for the animal's care or supervision. All students are responsible to clean up after and properly dispose of their animal's feces while on campus.

It is the handler's responsibility to ensure that the service animal is in good health, clean, free of fleas and ticks, and is at all times in compliance with all state of Michigan laws, Kent County and City of Grand Rapids laws/ordinances and requirements associated with licensing, vaccinations, and other health regulations.

Aquinas College highly recommends that students with service animals in residence contact the residence life office to inform residence life staff of the presence of the animal. This will allow residence life to best support and prepare for the student and animal in residence.

Expectations of Campus Community Relating to Service Animals

Members of the campus community are expected to abide by the following practices:

1. Do not touch or pet a service animal as it distracts them from the task at hand.
2. Do not feed a service animal.
3. Do not deliberately startle a service animal.
4. Do not separate or attempt to separate an owner/handler from their service animal.
5. Do not hesitate to ask an owner/handler if they would like assistance if the team (handler and service animal) seems confused about a direction to turn, an accessible entrance, entrance to an elevator, etc.

Definition of Assistance Animal (Other labels may include Emotional Support Animal, or Therapy Animal)

While only service animals are recognized under the Rehabilitation Act and ADA, the FHA provides for a broader range of assistance, including therapy or emotional support animals in campus housing. These can be called assistance animals, emotional support animals, or therapy animals. The definition includes an animal that works, provides assistance, or performs tasks or services for the benefit of a person with a disability or an animal whose role is to provide companionship, affection, security, calming influence, emotional support, or otherwise function as part of a regimen of psychological treatment. Federal law does not give assistance animals access to the campus as a whole. While a college or university may be required to reasonably accommodate a therapy animal in a residence hall or campus apartment, the institution is not required to allow that student to bring the animal to other areas or buildings on campus unless the

animal also qualifies as service animal under ADA and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Type and Age of Assistance Animals

Per guidance of HUD, assistance animals may be those that are traditionally kept in the home: dog, cat, small bird, rabbit, hamster, gerbil, other rodent, fish, turtle, or other small, domesticated animal that is traditionally kept in the home for pleasure rather than for commercial purposes. Reptiles (other than turtles), barnyard animals, monkeys, kangaroos, and other non-domesticated animals are not considered common household animals. Rare exceptions may be considered when there may be a specific health reason stipulating this type of animal, or if the animal is trained to perform specific tasks that other animals cannot/have not been trained to perform.

Process for Requesting Assistance Animals in Housing

A student resident requesting use of an assistance animal in Aquinas housing must contact the Accessibility Services Office in advance, preferably 30 days before animal in housing is needed. Students wishing to request an assistance animal in residence should contact the Accessibility Services Department via phone or email to initiate the request. The Director of Accessibility Services will provide clear steps for documenting a disability and request for the animal, as guided by the Aquinas College Assistance Animal Documentation Form. Students requesting an assistance animal that provides emotional support as a reasonable accommodation under FHA will provide reliable documentation of a disability from a physician, psychiatrist or other licensed mental health professional qualified to assess that the animal provides assistance or emotional support that alleviates one or more of the identified symptoms, substantial impacts, or effects of an existing disability.

Once approved, the use of an assistance animal will be validated by an official accommodation letter from the Accessibility Services Office to the student requesting the accommodation, and to the Director of Residence Life. The student is not permitted to bring an assistance animal on campus prior to meeting with the Director of Residence Life, or the Director's designee, unless written authorization is provided by the Director of Residence Life, or the Director's designee. During the meeting with the Director of Residence Life, or the Director's designee, the student will sign the "Assistance Animal Requirements and Student Responsibilities", as well as provide emergency contact information for the assistance animal. Requests to have an assistance animal in campus housing are considered requests for accommodation, and will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

The college may deny a request for an animal in housing if the presence of the animal poses a threat to the health and safety of others, would cause substantial physical damage to the property of others or the college, would pose an undue financial and administrative burden, or would fundamentally alter the nature of housing operations.

Assistance Animal Requirements and Student Responsibilities

A person who has a service or assistance animal on campus (including in college housing) is financially responsible for any property damage that may be caused by his or her animal. All service/assistance animals must be at least 12 months of age unless an exception to this requirement has been approved by Aquinas College.

General:

1. Assistance animals must be contained within the private residential area (room or apartment) at all times except when transported outside the private residential area to travel off-campus in an animal carrier or controlled by leash or harness.
2. Assistance animals may not accompany their owners to classes or into Aquinas College facilities other than the owner's designated residence.
3. Only assistance animals approved by the Accessibility Services Office are allowed to live in college-owned housing.
4. The animal must have updated vaccinations, licenses, and identification in compliance with local and state laws. The animal must also comply with local leash laws. Applicable Michigan State laws, Kent County, and City of Grand Rapids laws/ordinances are in force and effect, and animal owners are expected to comply with them at all times. Dogs are to be licensed in the city of Grand Rapids, and a copy of the current license must be on file with the Director of Residence Life. Any assistance animal have vet records showing the animal is healthy and up-to-date on immunizations (if required); proof of vaccinations must be on file with the Director of Residence Life for dogs and cats.
 - a. [Kent County Animal Control Licensing](#)
 - b. [Kent County Animal Control Regulations](#)

Animal Care:

1. Animals must be housebroken and/or litter box trained. The animal owner/handler is responsible for properly containing and disposing of all animal waste per the guidelines provided by the Residence Life Office for the assigned residential area. Outdoor waste must be removed from the designated relief area immediately, placed in a plastic bag and securely tied before being disposed of in

outside trash receptacles. Indoor waste must be placed in a sturdy bag and tied securely before being disposed of in designated receptacles. Waste from litter boxes or cages must be disposed of regularly.

2. The animal owner/handler must retain full control of the animal at all times. This means that when the animal is in a common area (being transported off-campus and/or to the designated relief area) it is on a leash, in a carrier, or otherwise in the direct control of the animal owner/handler. When in the presence of others, the animal is expected to be well behaved, not jumping on or nipping at people, not snarling or barking.
3. The assistance animal must be in good health. The owner must ensure that the animal is current on all veterinarian-recommended vaccinations and free of parasites, such as fleas and ticks. Such documentation shall be provided to the College prior to the animal's arrival and then on an annual basis. If fleas, ticks, or other pests are detected through routine inspection, the owner/handler will be responsible for the expense of pest treatment beyond standard pest management used in College housing and must seek appropriate treatment for the animal.
4. The animal owner must ensure the animal wears identification tags (if appropriate to the animal type) with owner/handler contact information and applicable vaccination or licensing information. If the type of animal providing assistance is not able to wear tags, the same information must be provided on or near the animal's cage and must be able to be produced at any time upon request.
5. When the owner/handler is absent from the room for a short period of time, the assistance animal must be appropriately contained and under control, through crating the animal or ensuring the animal is in an appropriate space within the living area. Animals that are commonly caged should remain in their cage when the owner/handler is away. Communication with roommates is strongly encouraged regarding actions that will be taken to contain the animal while absent from the room for short periods.
6. Assistance animals will not be left alone for extended periods in the owner/handler's residence. This means when the owner/handler leaves campus for weekends, breaks, or any other lengthy period of time the animal will go with the owner/handler.
7. The assistance animal will have fresh water and appropriate food on a daily basis.
8. College facilities are not to be used for bathing/grooming of the animal.

9. If animal neglect is suspected, Residence Life will investigate the issue and contact the owner/handler and the City of Grand Rapids/Kent County Animal Services. If the owner/handler is responsible for neglect, it could result in immediate removal of the animal. The owner/handler is solely responsible for the health and safety of the assistance animal.
10. The owner/handler will provide the Residence Life Office with an emergency contact name and phone number. In the case of an emergency, the owner/handler gives the emergency contact person permission to access the room to collect the animal and necessary items (food, leash, container, etc.). Generally, the student is responsible for contacting this individual to make arrangements. Residence Life staff will do so only if the owner/handler is unable to do so. As much as possible, the emergency contact person should not be another student residing on-campus. If no one is identified or the listed individual cannot be reached in a reasonable amount of time, the animal may be turned over to animal control or another local agency, possibly at the expense of the owner/handler.

Expectations for Animal Interaction with Roommates and Community:

1. The animal owner/handler is responsible for the actions of his or her animal. The owner/handler is responsible for any odors, noise, damage, or conduct of his or her animal that disturbs others and/or damages the premises.
2. The owner/handler is responsible for any damage or injuries caused by their animal and must take appropriate precautions to prevent property damage or injury.
3. The owner/handler is responsible for assuring the animal does not interfere with the orderly operation of the residence or cause difficulties for other residents of the community. Sensitivity to residents with allergies and to those who fear animals is important to ensure a positive residential community.
4. The owner/handler is responsible for instructing others on appropriate interactions with the animal and setting clear expectations.
5. Roommates will be notified about the presence of the animal. Notification will include animal type. Roommates may request a room change from Residence Life if they have a desire to do so. Roommates are not responsible for the care or control of an animal in a room.
6. If the owner/handler requests maintenance for the residence, they will be given the opportunity to coordinate with Facilities on a time that will work with their schedule to be present for the maintenance. When College staff are present in the room, the owner/handler must cage, leash, and/or be in control of the animal.

Other:

1. Assistance animals must sleep in the owner/handler's room.
2. The college is not responsible for the animal during a fire alarm, fire drill or natural disaster. In the case of an emergency situation, the owner/handler should crate the animal (if appropriate) and transport the animal to an evacuation or safe area.
3. The owner/handler is financially responsible for the actions of the animal including bodily injury (see [Michigan Bite Law](#)), property damage, excessive cleaning, replacement of furniture, flooring, carpet, blinds, etc. The owner/handler will be responsible for returning the unit to the same condition of move-in as reported on the room condition report completed at the start of one's residency (not including changes due to normal wear and tear). This may include the cost of cleaning carpets and furniture to remove pet odors, dander, hair, stains, unsanitary conditions, etc. If items cannot be satisfactorily cleaned or repaired, the student will be charged for complete replacement. Costs are expected to be paid at the time of repair or move-out, whichever is earlier. All repairs or work that is required to clean a room or make repairs must be completed by staff that are employed by or contracted through/arranged by the College. The student is not permitted to solicit his/her own cleaning or repair services for work on the premises.
4. The owner/handler must notify the Accessibility Services Office in writing if the assistance animal is no longer needed in residence. To replace an assistance animal, the student must submit a new request and required documentation to the Accessibility Services Office.
5. Owners of assistance animals must comply with the same College rules regarding noise, safety, disruption, and cleanliness as other residents of campus housing.
6. The owner/handler name, room #, and animal type will be provided to necessary staff members at the College who are responsible for maintaining safety, managing the facilities, and enforcing policy in campus residences.

Removal of Approved Assistance Animal

The owner/handler of an assistance animal may be asked to remove the animal from College housing for any of the following reasons, up to and including:

- The owner/handler's failure to comply with any of the guidelines or responsibilities set forth in this document;
- The animal is out of control

- The animal is not housebroken or the owner/handler fails to appropriately dispose of fecal waste;
- It causes substantial property damage to the property of others, including College property
- The owner/handler is responsible for neglect
- The animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of the campus community.

Conflicting Disabilities

Individuals who have medical issues and/or a disability and are adversely affected by animals (e.g. respiratory diseases, asthma, severe allergies) are asked to contact the Director of Accessibility Services. The person making the complaint must show verifiable medical documentation to support their complaint. Action will be taken to consider the needs of both persons and to resolve the problem as efficiently and expeditiously as possible.

Confidentiality

Information regarding disability accommodations is considered confidential information and is maintained in separate, secure files with limited access and is only shared on a need-to-know basis. Authorizations for animals used for disability related accommodations are made based on medical and/or mental health documentation and are not subject to challenge.

Policy Revisions and Review

This policy is subject to revision and will be reviewed annually.

Resources:

[FAQ about Service and Assistance Animals](#)
[Government FHA and Service or Assistance Animals](#)