

# Emotional Support Animals in Charleston Southern University Housing

Office of Residence Life / Office of Accessibility Services

## 1. Purpose

This policy section establishes the rules and procedures for requests, approval, and ongoing management of emotional support animals ("ESAs") in University-managed housing. It is designed to provide students with disabilities reasonable accommodation under applicable federal housing/disability law; protect the health, safety, and rights of all residents; and ensure ownership, care, oversight, and housing integrity when an ESA resides in campus housing.

## 2. Definitions

- Housing Provider: Charleston Southern University, through the Office of Residence Life.
- Emotional Support Animal (ESA): An animal that provides emotional support to an individual with a documented disability, alleviating one or more identified symptoms or effects of the disability. ESAs are not service animals under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Service Animal: As defined under the ADA (typically a dog trained to perform tasks for a person with a disability).
- Owner/Handler: A student residing in University housing who has requested and been approved to have an ESA as part of a housing accommodation.
- Residence / Private Living Space: The student's assigned housing unit (room, suite, apartment) for on-campus housing.

## 3. Scope

This policy applies to all students requesting to keep an ESA in Charleston Southern University housing and residing in on-campus housing. Pets or animals kept for general companionship are not approved as an accommodation and are not allowed in University housing.

## 4. Accommodation Request and Approval

Students must register with the Office of Accessibility/Disability Services and submit a request for an ESA in housing as part of the housing accommodation process. The documentation submitted must include: (1) a professional documentation of the disability; (2) a statement from a medical professional showing that the ESA is medically necessary to afford the student an equal opportunity to use and enjoy the housing; (3) animal health and immunization/veterinary records (vaccination, licensure) must be submitted to Residence Life. No ESA may be placed in University housing until written approval has been granted

by the University following completion of the evaluation and agreement process. Failure to follow proper procedures may result in fines.

## **5. Residence Housing Rules for Approved ESAs**

Once approved, the Owner must meet the following conditions and responsibilities.

### **5.1 Behavior / Damage / Liability**

The ESA must be housebroken or reliably litter-trained. The Owner is financially responsible for any property damage or personal injury caused by the ESA. The University may require removal of the ESA if it poses a direct threat to health or safety, is disruptive, or if the Owner fails to meet the policy responsibilities.

### **5.2 Relationship with ESA**

The owner must have at least a six month relationship with the animal before bringing it in to University housing. This requirement allows for the animal to be fully house-broken and crate trained, as well as accustomed to the owner. All requests for ESAs must be made and approved prior to the start of the semester.

### **5.3 General Location/Access**

The ESA is limited to the Owner's assigned residence unit and the immediate surrounding area (e.g., outdoor relief area). The ESA is not permitted in other University buildings, common indoor areas, classrooms, or labs unless explicitly approved. Only one ESA per room will be allowed. Failure to abide by these rules will result in fines.

### **5.4 Containment / Unattended Animal**

When the Owner is not present in the residence unit, the ESA must be contained in an appropriately sized crate, carrier, or other approved enclosure inside the Owner's living space. The ESA must not be left in the care of another student, roommate, or unauthorized person, and must not be left unattended overnight. This requirement includes cats.

### **5.5 Proper Identification**

In accordance with Charleston County Animal Ordinance 1702 Section 3-17, all dogs and cats must have a durable metal or plastic identification tag on the collar of the animal which has permanently stamped thereon owner's address and phone number. The tag shall be maintained in such a condition as to make the stamped or printed information clearly legible. Microchip technology or tattooing as otherwise provided by law may be used in lieu of a collar tag, provided that owner identification and contact information remains current. Owner must show proof of microchipping.

### **5.6 Health, Hygiene, and Care**

The Owner must provide up-to-date veterinary records with vaccinations. The ESA must be well-groomed, free from pests, and must not create an odor, excessive shedding, or sanitation hazard. The Owner is responsible for all cleaning, waste disposal, and pest control costs resulting from the ESA.

For a cat ESA: the Owner must ensure that a litter box is used and maintained daily and properly. Litter must be disposed of hygienically, and the litter box placed on a protective mat or liner to prevent tracking or damage to flooring.

#### **5.7 Exceptions to the ESA policy:**

- Exotic, poisonous, unlawful, or any other animals that pose a direct threat to the health and/or safety of the campus community will not be permitted as ESAs.
- Due to the physical size of CSU campus residence hall rooms, a size restriction of a 40-pound maximum weight will apply to all ESA requests.
- The weight policy does not apply to Service Animals (as defined by the ADA) on campus.

#### **6. Conflicts with Roommates / Other Residents**

All roommates or suitemates must complete and sign an acknowledgment form indicating awareness and consent to the ESA's presence. If a roommate does not consent, the University may provide alternate housing arrangements if available or mediate as needed.

#### **7. Removal or Denial of ESA**

Requests for ESA animals must be completed prior to, but not later than the end of Drop/Add week at the beginning of the academic semester. The communal living nature of the residence hall requires the institution to consider the comfort and concerns of all students in residence. Introducing animals during the semester is disruptive to the living environment of the other students in the room/suite. Mid-semester requests will be processed for the following semester.

The University reserves the right to deny or revoke ESA approval if the animal is unmanageable, poses a direct threat, creates substantial damage, or if the Owner fails to comply with policy expectations. Upon notice, the Owner must remove the animal within a designated timeframe (e.g., 48 hours).

#### **8. Policy Review & Amendments**

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure compliance with applicable laws and best practices. Amendments may be made by the University's Housing and Accessibility leadership.