

## Guidelines for Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) on Campus

The University of Alabama in Huntsville is committed to reasonably accommodating individuals with documented disabilities who require the assistance of emotional support animals (ESAs). The University is mindful of the health and safety concerns of the campus community. The University must balance the need of the individual with the disability and the potential impact of the animal on other members of the campus community. The successful implementation of these guidelines requires the cooperation of students and staff.

### ***Definitions:***

#### **Disability:**

Disability is defined as a physical, mental or medical condition or impairment that limits one or more of a person's major life activities or is demonstrable by medically accepted clinical or laboratory diagnostic techniques. These limitations may include: Caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, and learning.

#### **Emotional Support Animal:**

An emotional support animal (ESA) is an animal that provides therapeutic benefit to an individual with a psychiatric disability upon the written recommendation of the individual's physician, psychiatrist, social worker, or other licensed mental health professional. Letters purchased online are not accepted. An ESA provides emotional support that alleviates one or more identified symptoms of the owner's disability. An ESA is limited to the owner's specific residence and designated outdoor areas on campus only. An ESA must be housebroken and under the control of the owner at all times.

#### **Pet:**

A pet is an animal kept for ordinary use and companionship unrelated to a disability. A pet is not considered an emotional support animal, and therefore is not covered by this policy. Individuals are not allowed to have pets on University property. Discovery of pets may result in a fee of \$100 per day.

### ***Responsibility of Students with Emotional Support Animals:***

**Care and Supervision:** The student is responsible for the care, control, and supervision of their ESA at all times. The student is responsible for ensuring the cleanup of their ESA's waste and, when appropriate, must relieve the animal in areas designated by the University. Students should purchase and utilize disposal bags for solid pet waste and place in trash receptacles as appropriate. If the student leaves campus for a period of time, they must take the ESA with them or arrange care for their ESA off-campus. The student may not leave the ESA on campus overnight.

**Health and Safety:** The student is responsible to ensure that the health and safety of others is not threatened by the ESA. ESAs authorized to live in University housing must not interfere with others' enjoyment of the residential space (e.g., by excessive barking, creating unsanitary conditions, etc.). Proof of current rabies vaccination and of a current Huntsville City License is required for dogs and cats and must be submitted annually to Disability Support Services for review. ESAs that are dogs and cats must wear their rabies and city license tags at all times on campus. For all species: Proof of good health from the animal's veterinarian must be provided annually to Disability Support Services for review.

**Other Conditions:** In response to a particular situation, The University of Alabama in Huntsville may impose reasonable conditions or restrictions if necessary to ensure the health, safety and reasonable enjoyment of others.

**Removal of Emotional Support Animal:** The owner of an ESA may be asked to remove the animal from University facilities if the owner or animal fails to comply with the policy. The following describes behaviors which may result in the removal of the animal.

**Disruptive Behavior:** An animal may be removed if its behavior is unruly or disruptive (e.g., barking, growling, damaging personal belongings of individuals other than the owner, or displaying aggressive behavior). The owner may be prohibited from bringing the animal on campus until the owner takes significant and effective remedial steps to correct the animal's behavioral problems. Disruptive or destructive behavior of ESAs can be considered a violation of the UAH Student Code of Conduct.

**Poor Health:** Animals with health conditions that pose a threat to others are not permitted.

**Uncleanliness:** The ESA must be kept clean and free of pests. Owners who fail to properly clean up and dispose of their animal's waste may be required to remove the animal from University property. It is the responsibility of the owner to relieve the animal in designated areas and to bag and dispose of solid pet waste in a trash receptacle. An ESA that becomes wet from walking in the rain or mud, but is otherwise clean, is considered a clean animal.

**Responsibility for Damage and/or Uncleanliness:** Owners of ESAs are solely responsible for any damage to persons or property caused by their animal. The owner's residence area may be inspected for physical damage, fleas, ticks, or other pests. If fleas, ticks, or other pests are detected through inspection, the residence will be treated using approved fumigation methods from a University-approved pest control service. The owner will be billed for the expense of any treatment. The owner's residence may be inspected to ensure that it is being properly cleaned and that sanitary and safe conditions are maintained. If required, the owner will be billed for the expense of the additional cleaning required.

### ***Emotional Support Animals in University Housing:***

ESAs **may not** reside in University housing without express written approval of University officials. Student requests begin in Disability Support Services (DSS) (128 Wilson Hall) who will verify the need for reasonable accommodations. The DSS Senior Coordinator will communicate with appropriate staff in University Housing and Residence Life about the request for an ESA. The student will be responsible for arranging a time to meet with their building's Resident Director to

discuss the rights and responsibilities of having an ESA in their living space. The student will obtain a roommate memorandum of agreement for their peers that live in the suite with them.

**ESA Request Process:**

1. A student requesting an ESA starts the process by registering with Disability Support Services. This includes completing an application for DSS, scheduling and completing an intake appointment with the DSS Senior Coordinator, and providing all necessary documentation requirements for the proposed ESA (including but not limited to rabies vaccination and Huntsville city license for cats and dogs, proof of good health from the veterinarian for all animal types, and signing the ESA Memorandum of Understanding).
2. The student must provide a signed letter on professional letterhead from the physician, psychiatrist, social worker, or other mental health professional that is treating them for their psychiatric disability. Staff employed at UAH Counseling Center do **not** issue documentation regarding requests for ESAs. Letters purchased online are not accepted.

**At a minimum, the letter should include the following terms:**

- a. The provider's professional opinion that the individual's condition qualifies as a disability as identified in the DSM-V or ICD-10
  - b. The provider's professional opinion and specific recommendation that an Emotional Support Animal is needed to help alleviate symptoms and impairment associated with the person's disability in order to allow the person to use and enjoy University Housing services or otherwise access their education
  - c. The provider's signature and credentials
3. Disability Support Services will review documentation and, if DSS determines a qualifying disability exists, a recommendation will be sent to the office of University Housing and Residence Life.

*Submitting a request for an ESA does not guarantee a specific accommodation will be approved. Students must complete the ESA request process and receive approval from the DSS Senior Coordinator before engaging in any behaviors related to the requested ESA.*

**Conflicting Disabilities:**

UAH's Office of Housing and Residence Life will make a reasonable effort to notify individuals in the residence hall where the animal will be located of the existence of an ESA in the building.

Individuals with medical conditions that are affected by animals (respiratory diseases, asthma, severe allergies) should contact University Housing if they have a health or safety-related concern about exposure to an ESA. The resident will be asked to provide medical documentation that identifies their condition, and will allow for determination to be made as to whether the condition is disabling and whether there is a need for an accommodation for the individual reporting the concern. University Housing and Residence Life will resolve any conflict in a timely manner, considering the conflicting needs and/or accommodations of all persons involved.

Adapted from Jacksonville State University and Syracuse University's Service and Emotional Support Animals policy. Consulted with websites from University of Minnesota, Catholic University of America, NACUA Notes, Brigham Young University, Columbia University, Kenyon College, and University of Redlands. 5/19