

## VIRGINIA ZOO SERVICE ANIMAL POLICY

Updated 9/2024



The Virginia Zoo welcomes guests with disabilities who are accompanied by a trained service dog, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Thank you for your cooperation to ensure a safe and successful visit for yourself, your service dog, the animals cared for at the zoo, and other park guests.

**ONLY WORKING SERVICE ANIMALS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE AMERICAN WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) ARE ALLOWED AT THE ZOO.** Under the ADA, "a service animal is a dog that has been individually trained to work or perform tasks for assisting a person with a disability." Service dogs are working animals, not pets. **Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA. Pets, comfort animals, emotional support or therapy animals are not permitted at the Zoo.**

**UPON ARRIVAL AT THE ZOO, HANDLERS MUST CHECK IN WITH GUEST SERVICES** so a team member can review some logistical items with you. Guest/handler for the service dog is solely responsible for the care and control of their animal. As stipulated by the ADA, Zoo staff may request that a service dog experiencing difficulty or demonstrating problematic behaviors, such as barking or lunging, be removed from the Zoo immediately. We ask that you promptly comply with any such request for the safety and welfare of all.

Since service dogs can pose certain concerns and challenges within a zoo setting, it is important that we advise you of our policies regarding these animals and ask for your cooperation.

For the safety of you, your service dog, and the animals in our care:

- A. **A SERVICE DOG MUST BE LEASHED AND UNDER HANDLER'S CONTROL AT ALL TIMES.** A service dog is required to be on a physical leash, harness, or tether while on Virginia Zoo premises. At no time should a service dog be in contact with fences, mesh, wire, railings, glass, or other exhibit barriers. E-collars do not meet the requirements of being leashed and are not allowed in lieu of a leash. In addition to the Zoo's policies, the handler must abide by the City of Norfolk's leash law.
- B. **IF EITHER A ZOO ANIMAL OR SERVICE DOG ARE VISIBLY UPSET OR AGITATED BY THE OTHER'S PRESENCE, THE HANDLER AND SERVICE ANIMAL MUST MOVE AWAY FROM THAT EXHIBIT IMMEDIATELY.** Signs of agitation include, but are not limited to barking, howling, growling, bumping into exhibit window or walls, jumping, climbing, running around exhibit and/or erratic movements.
- C. **THE HANDLER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CARING FOR AND SUPERVISING THEIR SERVICE DOG, WHICH INCLUDES TOILETING AND FEEDING.** The zoo is not able to provide a rest area or supplies for service dogs. Please come prepared with anything you think your animal might need during your visit. If a service dog needs to relieve itself, handlers may exit the park temporarily at any Admissions gate. A service dog that is not housebroken will be asked to leave the park.
- D. **SENSITIVE AREAS/PROGRAMS:** Some areas or programs in the zoo, while not restricted, may pose an increased potential for the presence of a dog to be disruptive and may place zoo animals at increased risk. These areas and programs are considered sensitive due to their unique

circumstances. Handlers are welcome to take their service dog to these areas/programs while practicing extra caution and abiding by the instructions of Virginia Zoo staff.

- a. Any program or encounter involving an animal ambassador. These include but are not limited to: ZooLive! Stage presentations, Zoo Tales, Animal Ambassador encounters throughout the zoo, Zoo Edventure and World Traveler school programs, and Birthday Parties
- b. Behind-the-Scenes tours

E. **RESTRICTED AREAS:** Some animals can strongly react to the presence of a dog; therefore, service dogs are restricted from some specific locations. Included in these restricted areas are places where zoo animals can choose to roam among guests or activities where zoo animals have limited or no barriers. Service dogs are not permitted at:

- a. Goat Yard in the ZooFarm

F. The zoo reserves the right to modify this information and accessibility policies as appropriate, such as changes to sensitive and/or restricted areas. Guests with service dogs are required to stop at Admissions Booth upon arrival to receive current information about their visit.

G. **SERVICE DOGS IN TRAINING:** Service Dogs in Training will be welcome to access into The Virginia Zoo if they meet the requirements set forth by the Commonwealth of Virginia. By Virginia State Statute 51.5-44 Service Dogs in Training who are 6 months and older and are:

- (i) In harness, provided such person is an experienced trainer of guide dogs or is conducting continuing training of a guide dog;
- (ii) On a blaze orange leash, provided such person is an experienced trainer of hearing dogs or is conducting continued training of a hearing dog;
- (iii) In a harness, backpack, or vest identifying the dog as a trained service dog, provided such person is an experienced trainer of service dogs or is conducting continuing training of a service dog;
- (iv) Wearing a jacket identifying the recognized guide, hearing, or service dog organization, provided such person is an experienced trainer of the organization identified on the jacket; or
- (v) The person is part of a three-unit service dog team and is conducting continuing training of a service dog.

**If there is a situation where the handler is not able to maintain control over the service animal, we would need you to remove the animal from the Zoo. We ask that you promptly comply with any such request for the safety and welfare of all.**

For additional questions, or assistance with planning your visit, please contact Guest Services at [info@virginiazoo.org](mailto:info@virginiazoo.org) or 757-441-2374, ext. 257. Due to high volume of correspondence, we recommend reaching out at least 7 days prior to a planned visit.