# Understanding Service Animal Laws in Chicago: A Landlord's Guide from Manage369

## Key Takeaways

✔ Service animals are not pets and must be accommodated without pet fees or deposits under fair housing laws.

✔ Limited verification is allowed, but landlords cannot request training certificates or detailed medical information.

✔ Reasonable accommodations are required unless the animal poses a direct threat or significant property damage.

✔ Clear, consistent policies help protect both landlords and residents from legal risk.

## Service Animals and Fair Housing: What Every Chicago Landlord Should Know

At Manage369 Property Management, we often hear from landlords who feel uncertain when handling rental applications involving service animals. It's understandable — the legal responsibilities are specific, and the stakes are high. In Chicago, understanding the rights of residents with disabilities, as well as your own obligations as a housing provider, is critical to avoiding legal trouble and maintaining a respectful, compliant community.

## Service Animals Are Not Pets

One of the most common misconceptions is that service animals fall under a property’s pet policy. They do not. Service animals are trained to perform specific tasks for individuals with disabilities and are legally protected under the Fair Housing Act (FHA). This means:  
- You cannot enforce no-pet policies on service animals.  
- You cannot charge pet deposits, fees, or pet rent.  
- You cannot restrict breeds or sizes if the animal qualifies.

## Reasonable Accommodation Is Required

If a qualified resident with a disability requests to live with a service animal, you're required to provide reasonable accommodation — even if your building has a no-pets policy. This isn’t about special treatment. It’s about providing equal access to housing as mandated by federal and state law.

## Verification Is Allowed — With Limits

When the need for a service animal is not readily apparent, landlords are allowed to request limited documentation. This typically includes a letter from a medical or mental health professional confirming that the resident has a disability and that the animal assists them. However:  
- You cannot request a diagnosis or detailed medical records.  
- You cannot ask for the animal to demonstrate its task.  
- You cannot require a certificate of training.

## No Pet Fees or Extra Deposits

Service animals are not subject to pet fees or deposits of any kind. However, tenants are still responsible for any damages caused by their animal — just as any resident would be responsible for damage caused by a guest.

## You Cannot Demand Training Certificates

Chicago landlords sometimes ask: Can I request proof that the animal is trained? The answer is no. Service animals are not legally required to have formal training or certification. If the animal assists with a disability, it qualifies — regardless of where or how it was trained.

## When You Can Deny a Request

There are rare situations when a service animal may legally be denied, such as:  
- The animal has a history of aggression or bites.  
- It causes significant property damage that cannot be reasonably prevented.

## Apply Policies Consistently

Consistency is critical. If you manage multiple units, be sure that you handle every service animal request with the same process and documentation. Unequal treatment can lead to fair housing complaints — even when done unintentionally.

## Service Animals vs. Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)

It’s important to understand the difference:  
- Service animals are trained to perform specific tasks related to a disability.  
- Emotional support animals (ESAs) provide comfort but do not require training.

## Residents Must Control the Animal

While service animals are protected, that does not exempt residents from their responsibilities. Residents must ensure the animal:  
- Is not aggressive toward other tenants  
- Does not create a noise nuisance  
- Is leashed or under control in common areas  
- Does not cause damage to property

## Let Manage369 Handle the Details

Navigating service animal rules in Chicago can be overwhelming. At Manage369, we help landlords and associations create policies, evaluate requests, and respond to concerns — all while ensuring full compliance with local and federal laws.

## Contact Manage369

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