

# POLICY REGARDING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS: ACCESS TO OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY FACILITIES, PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND ACTIVITIES

## I. POLICY STATEMENT:

Oklahoma City University recognizes the importance of emotional support animals to individuals with disabilities and has established the following policy regarding emotional support animals, to provide a reasonable accommodation to people with disabilities. This policy ensures that people with disabilities who require the use of emotional support animals as a reasonable accommodation will receive the benefit of the therapeutic support they provide. The University is committed to allowing people with disabilities the use of an emotional support animal on campus to facilitate their full benefit and enjoyment of campus housing and services. This policy sets forth the specific requirements and guidelines concerning the appropriate use of and protocols associated with emotional support animals. The University reserves the right to amend this policy as circumstances require.

This policy does not address the University's policies concerning the on-campus presence of animals that do not qualify as emotional support animals. See the Policies section of the University's website for policies concerning the presence of other animals on campus: <http://www.okcu.edu/policies/>

## II. DEFINITIONS:

**Emotional Support Animal:** "Emotional Support Animals" are defined as animals that provide emotional support that alleviates one or more identified symptom(s) or effect(s) of a person's disability. An emotional support animal is also an animal that provides comfort, reassurance, social interaction, and other emotional benefits. The animal does not need to be trained to provide comfort. An emotional support animal is not considered a service animal. The question is whether or not the animal performs support or provides the benefit needed as a reasonable accommodation by the person with the disability. Unlike a service animal, an emotional support animal does not assist a person with a disability with activities of daily living, nor does it accompany a person with a disability at all times. Emotional support animals may be considered for access to university housing; however, they are not permitted in other areas of the university (e.g. libraries, academic buildings, classrooms, labs, student center, etc.).

**Approved Animal:** An "Approved Animal" is an emotional support animal that has been granted approval as a reasonable accommodation under this policy. An individual requesting an accommodation to bring his or her emotional support animal to campus must provide documentation to support the reasonable accommodation requests. Emotional support animals whose behavior poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others or is disruptive to the campus community may be excluded, regardless of training or certification.

**Pet:** A "Pet" is an animal kept for ordinary use and companionship. A pet is not considered a service animal or an emotional support animal. It is not covered by this policy. Pets are not permitted on university property or in university housing.

### **III. PROCEDURES FOR REQUESTING PERMISSION TO HAVE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS IN UNIVERSITY HOUSING AS A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION**

Campus Disability Services is responsible for evaluating whether to grant or deny requests for reasonable accommodations in University housing. In evaluating the request, Campus Disability Services will consult with the University Housing, the OCU ADA/504 coordinator, and OCU General Council as needed to determine whether the requested accommodation is necessary and reasonable. Individuals with a disability who reside or intend to reside in University housing who believe they need a reasonable accommodation must contact Campus Disability Services.

Requests for reasonable accommodation in University housing policies and practices are governed by the Housing Accommodation Policy. Please refer to the Housing Accommodation Policy when requesting an emotional support animal. It is important to note that documentation for an emotional support animal **MUST** be provided by a mental health professional and cannot be from a general physician. In most cases, a person cannot have more than one emotional support animal, unless otherwise approved by Campus Disability Services.

### **IV. AREAS OFF LIMITS TO EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS**

All areas except for privately assigned living space in housing are off limits to approved emotional support animals without prior authorization from Campus Disabilities Services. Emotional support animals are only allowed in a student's living space, not the shared space of an apartment or residence hall.

### **V. PARTNERS/HANDLERS' RESPONSIBILITIES IN UNIVERSITY HOUSING**

In regard to canines, the partner/handler is encouraged to affix a tag (which may be provided by Campus Disability Services) to the canine's collar in order to identify it as an "OCU Approved ESA." Even though this is not a requirement, the partner/handler is strongly encouraged to do this in order to identify to other students and housing employees that the canine is an approved ESA animal and not an "illegal pet" staying in campus housing.

The partner/handler is responsible for assuring that the approved animal does not unduly interfere with the routine activities of the residence or cause difficulties for students who reside there.

The partner/handler is financially responsible for the actions of the approved animal, including actions resulting in bodily injury or property damage. The partner/handler's responsibility covers but is not limited to replacement of furniture, carpet, window, wall covering, and the like. The partner/handler is expected to cover these costs at the time of repair and/or move-out.

The partner/handler must notify the Campus Disabilities Services Coordinator in writing if the approved animal is no longer needed as an approved animal or is no longer in residence. To

replace an approved animal the partner/handler must file a new Request for Disability Housing Accommodation.

The partner/handler's residence may be inspected for fleas, ticks, or other pests once a semester or as needed. The applicable housing office for the residence hall will schedule the inspection. If fleas, ticks or other pests are detected through inspection, the residence will be treated using approved fumigation methods by a University-approved pest control service. The partner/handler will be billed for the expense of any pest treatment above and beyond standard pest management in the residence halls.

(For students in the Residence Halls and/or Apartment shares) All roommates or suitemates of the partner/handler must sign an agreement allowing the approved animal to be in residence with them. In the event that one or more roommates or suitemates do not approve, either the partner/handler and animal or the non-approving roommates or suitemates, as determined by the appropriate Housing office for the residence location, may be moved to a different location.

Approved animals may not be left alone for 24 hours in University Housing to be cared for by another student. Animals must be taken with the student partner/handler if he or she leaves campus for a prolonged period. If the animal is left unattended for more than 24 hours, the animal will be handed over to a local humane society or shelter.

Housing has the ability to relocate a partner/handler and approved animal as necessary according to current contractual agreements.

The partner/handler must agree to abide by all other residential policies. A reasonable accommodation that may constitute an exception to a policy that would otherwise prohibit having an animal in student housing does not constitute an exception to any other policy.

Any violation of the above rules may result in immediate removal of the animal from the University and may be reviewed through the Student Code of Conduct Process, and the partner/handler will be afforded all rights of due process and appeal as outlined in that process.

Should the approved animal be removed from the premises for any reason, the partner/handler is expected to fulfill his or her housing obligations for the remainder of the housing contract.