

Sample Verification Letter

Printed on the Healthcare Provider's Letterhead

(Part I)

Date:

Dear Housing Provider:

I have been _____ Name _____'s _____ [counselor, nurse, doctor, therapist, psychiatrist] since _____.

I am aware that the Fair Housing Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act define disability as:

1. A physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of the person's major life activities, and/or
2. A record of having a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of the person's major life activities, and/or
3. Being regarded as having a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of the person's major life activities.

Major life activity includes, but is not limited to: caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and/or working.

I affirm that _____ Name _____ has a disability which meets this legal definition.

(Part II)

_____ Name _____ has disabilities that REQUIRE *an assistance animal (a cat, named: Toby) .

It is NECESSARY _____ Name _____ be granted an accommodation for *an assistance animal in their housing as quickly as possible so _____ Name _____'s disabilities will be ameliorated, not exacerbated and/or continue to worsen.

Sincerely,
[Doctor, Nurse, Physician Assistant, Therapist/Counselor, Social Worker, Psychiatrist, Independent Living Specialist, etc.]

Healthcare Provider's Contact info

***RA examples:** a reserved parking space, a tenancy extension, a release of lease without penalty, a transfer of units, submission of rent via mail, etc.

***RM examples:** grab bar or ramp installation, replacing round door knobs with flat lever knobs, lowering counters, widening a door way, putting in a roll in shower, etc. **Who Pays?** Modifications often have a cost which is the burden of the person with disabilities unless they are living in a federally subsidized building. It is highly suggested to document the modification request and the expectations at the end of tenancy regarding restoration.

Who is defined as a "Person with a Disability"?

Under the Fair Housing Act, a disability is defined as:

- A physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities
- A record of such an impairment, or,
- Being regarded as having such an impairment.

Under RCW 49.60, the Washington State Law Against Discrimination, (WLAD), disability is defined to include conditions that are temporary or permanent, common or uncommon, mitigated or unmitigated.



If you think you have been discriminated against in a housing transaction, contact:

Northwest Fair Housing Alliance
25 W Main Ave., Suite 250
Spokane, WA 99201
509-325-2665
1-800-200-FAIR (3247)
Fax: 1-866-6308

NWFHA may be able to advise you of your options and advocate for you. Our services are free. Our office is accessible.

Federal Fair Housing Act

Assistance Animals in Housing

Guidance for People with Disabilities



**NORTHWEST FAIR
HOUSING ALLIANCE**

(509) 325-2665
1-800-200-FAIR (3247)
www.nwfairhouse.org

Reasonable Accommodation (RA) :

a change, exception, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service that allows a person with a disability to use and enjoy housing, including common areas. Having an assistance animal in “no pets” housing is an example of RA.

Assistance Animals

Owners call animals by different “titles” for example: therapy, emotional support, prescription, medical alert, companion, mobility, psychiatric, service animal, guide dog, etc. But the name does not matter. To be allowed as a reasonable accommodation, the animal must be **needed for a disability**. People with a variety of visible and invisible (physical or mental) disabilities use assistance animals to: retrieve medications, signal seizures, alert to insulin need, calm anxiety, ameliorate depression, anxiety, or PTSD, respond to and alert a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, provide guidance and navigation for people who are blind, etc.



Damages? Animal Certificates?

- **Damages:** The animal’s owner is responsible for assistance animal damages and may be charged for repairs or replacement during or after tenancy
- **Animal Certificates:** The animal’s “credentials” are not needed. It is the animal’s owner that is considered: 1) the person must have a disability; 2) a disability need/requirement for the animal must be established; and 3) the animal should be reasonable.

Breed, Size, Weight, Species

A housing provider’s pet rules about species, size, weight, and breed do not apply to assistance animals. However, the number of and species of animals allowed may be limited by your municipality’s laws (e.g., limits on number of domestic animals, prohibitions on wolves and venomous snakes, etc.)

Owner Responsibilities:

- Pick up after & properly dispose of animal’s waste
- Control the animal at all times, usually this means w/ a leash
- Animal behavior: no lunging, jumping on, biting, nipping or excessive barking
- License, shots, registration as required by the city or county where you live



Troubleshooting: mitigations

- Feces / waste — a caregiver/friend/family can help pick up waste & dispose of it properly for the person with the disabilities
- Nipping / biting — use a muzzle when going in and out of the building or into common areas such as an elevator or laundry room
- Barking excessively — obedience and handling training
- Running loose—additional training for voice control and/or leash use at all times



Requesting an Assistance Animal

- A person with a disability, or a representative (friend, family, advocacy organization) can make the request. There is no specific form or format that must be used for requests.
- Requests can be made verbally. For clarity, **it is highly recommended that requests be made in writing**. Keep a copy.
- The request does not need to disclose the nature or severity of the person’s disability, and housing providers cannot ask about these.
- It is necessary to show a need directly related to a disability.
- The person requesting an assistance animal may be asked to provide a **verification letter** from a health care provider or a reliable third party who knows about the individual’s disability (example on back.)
- Obvious, visible, or known disabilities **do not** require verification of the disability—but may require verification of the disability **related need** if not obvious or known.
- RA requests may be made any time in one’s tenancy (application through termination/eviction).
- There is no limit to the number of RA’s a person may request.