

University of Montevallo

Emotional Support Animal Procedures

***Due to COVID-19 developments, the University reserves the right to change these policies and procedures without notice. Students will be asked to maintain appropriate social distancing for their dogs, as current evidence suggests that dogs and cats can test positive for SARS-CoV-2. The risk to animals appears to be very low, but we are encouraging owners to protect themselves and their animals. If a dog owner tests positive and must self-isolate (and plans to remain on campus), the University reserves the right to ask that the student make immediate arrangements for the care of the animal off-campus, because walking the dog in and out of the building multiple times a day will not be allowed.**

Important Information regarding Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) in University Housing: Please read before obtaining documentation or making an ESA Housing request under the Fair Housing Act. Inquiries to allow an ESA in non-housing University buildings fall under a different law and should be directed to DSS.

Priority Deadlines for all disability-related housing accommodation requests, including ESAs:

Fall Request	May 1
Spring Request	October 1
Summer Request	March 1

For consideration to have an ESA approved to live on campus under the Fair Housing Act, students should submit the 3 items described on the [DSS website](#) by the *priority deadline*. All requests will be reviewed, even if submitted after the deadline, but DSS reserves the right to postpone review of any last-minute submissions (received within 2 weeks of the start of a term) until the end of the first week of class. The 3 items include a DSS application and the Disability-Related Housing and Dietary Request Form (both completed online by student), and an ESA Verification form (to be completed by student's mental health treatment professional).

This University approval process applies to on-campus University Housing only; DSS does not provide documentation or approval for an ESA for commercial or any non-university housing situation. ESA approval within in a residence hall follows a consistent case-by-case approach. **Students are subject to the usual housing policies and consequences if they bring animals outside of this approval.**

If an ESA is approved by the review committee, the student will be asked to complete the agreement on the last page of this document. In total, after approval, the following items must be submitted to DSS before the animal can arrive on campus 1) Fully completed ESA Housing Agreement, 2) current statement of good health/appropriate vaccinations, 3) Photo of the animal, and 4) Roommate Agreement(s) when applicable. Sufficient time for DSS to review documents and send notifications to Housing, UMPD and other relevant UM personnel is required.

Documentation of the mental health diagnosis and the associated need for an ESA should come from a mental health provider who knows and understands the difficulties and can explain how the presence of the animal may help to alleviate symptomology. Montevallo, along with many other universities across the country, is concerned about the growing number of questionable website services that offer to "certify" an ESA or to create "ESA letters" for a set price, often based answers to an online survey and/or phone call,

rather than actual counseling or clinical or medical therapy. *There is no formal, recognized certification of ESAs, and no recognized state or national "registry" of ESAs.* ESA certificates, ID badges, vests, online registries, etc., are not necessary nor considered in the approval process of an ESA. **The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has been asked to investigate websites that purport to provide documentation from a health care provider in support of requests for an ESA. Please reconsider before spending money on the purchase of such letters,** as they will rarely provide the information necessary to support your request for accommodation, and are typically not viewed by the University as a reliable source of information.

It is a class C misdemeanor under Alabama state law to misrepresent an animal as an assistance or service animal or to create or provide to others a document that misrepresents or falsely states that an animal is such for use in housing. Subsequent offenses are classified as class B misdemeanors. Approvals for an ESA are typically considered valid for a one academic year and an annual update will be necessary (as mental health conditions and their symptoms are variable).

Basic ESA Guidelines and Expectations:

1. ESA Verification Form (completed by the licensed mental health treatment professional) is required to be **updated annually**, as mental health disorders are, by definition, variable conditions. Letters may also be written assuming they address the questions in the ESA Verification Form. Treatment professional should be licensed in Alabama or in the student's home state and should have a treatment relationship with the student. Documentation provided by relatives will be not be considered acceptable.
2. Letters purchased from online doctors/companies (many of whom also sell letters for airline travel, apartment landlords, vests, ID badges, leashes and other specialty ESA merchandise) who have not personally evaluated/treated a student are very likely to be considered unacceptable documentation. All requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
3. A student may be found eligible for an ESA but the University has the right to deny a *specific* ESA as requested. The University has a responsibility to consider the impact on an overall living space, including roommates, hall mates, etc. Generally, **dogs must be at least 4-6 months of age** to live on campus, to be a bit more mature and to ensure they have all of the necessary vaccinations. **But students are strongly encouraged to wait until dogs are at least 9 -12 months old to assure that the dog is reliably housebroken and will not be disruptive to other residents.** Very young puppies often do not adjust well to the crowds and noise of a college residence hall and the excitement and stress can result in a loss of potty skill or excessive barking, which can be cause for the dog to be removed.
4. Certain animals may be deemed inappropriate for Montevallo's community living environment, such as farm animals, animals that are non-domestic, exotic, venomous or poisonous, animals that require live food, or those that are clearly too large or inappropriate for a residence hall. Animals at risk of zoonotic diseases will not be permitted without specific medical clearance from a veterinarian. Approval for any specific animal will be granted on a case-by-case basis. A different animal may need to be chosen as the ESA.

5. **Generally, no approvals will be granted for multiple ESAs.** If the selected animal is bonded with another animal (or for whatever reason needs to live in pairs), then a different animal should be considered when the request is made.
6. **ESAs are approved for the student's immediate living space only.** They are not allowed in other students' rooms, Greek chapter rooms, or in other common areas of the residence hall. ESA approved for housing cannot be taken to class or other campus buildings. If a request is made that the animal be allowed in other areas of campus, then additional documentation and discussion will be necessary, as that type of accommodation falls under a different federal law.
7. **All ESAs must be contained (*leashed, caged or crated*) at all times if the student is not in the room.** This is an important consideration in choosing the ESA. If it is not used to being crated or contained it could create significant stress for the animal, possibly resulting in excessive barking or behavioral problems. ESAs must be carried or leashed while being taken to and from the resident's room. Note that the city of Montevillo does have a local leash law.
8. **ESAs may not be left in the care of other on-campus residents.** Animals should never be left unattended in a residence hall for extended periods (time varies based on type of animal), and may not be left alone overnight, on weekends or during any university closing. It is a violation of Housing policy for students to give their key to other students, including to feed or care for the animal. Students will be fully responsible for the cost of any intervention on the part of the University should an animal be found unattended or neglected.
9. **Emergency contact information** must be provided to DSS/Housing in the event that the student owner of an ESA is hospitalized or has another unforeseen emergency and cannot care for the animal. **These must be individuals who agree to remove the ESA from campus for temporary care.** If the identified individuals decline or fail to remove the ESA, the University may relocate the ESA to a local boarding facility at the student's expense. **At least one contact person must be someone other than a parent or guardian, as they will likely be attending to student's immediate needs in a crisis.**
10. Appropriate **vaccination/ health records** (which may vary depending on type of animal) and a **photo** of the ESA must be submitted to DSS before the animal can be brought to campus. Annual updates regarding the ESA's health/vaccinations are required. The University may ask that the animal be removed if it is deemed neglected or in need of medical care.
11. **Animals must be house-broken**, if applicable. Student is responsible for emptying litter boxes and/or cleaning up outside animal waste and depositing it (bagged) in outside garbage bins. Animal waste may not be left in or near University buildings or on sidewalks or grass lawns.
12. Students bringing ESAs to campus are fully responsible for the animal's **behavior**, and for any damage done. If the ESA is disruptive to the living environment for others (e.g., barking, growling or other loud noises, fleas, or significant odor from the animal, litter boxes or cages), or if there is damage done to University facilities, the ESA will need to be removed from the premises within 24 hours of notice being given. Students are responsible for property damage, flea/pest services required due to animal and/or any cleaning deemed necessary beyond typical end-of-year maintenance. Students have full liability should the ESA bite, scratch or injure another student or staff member.

13. The University maintains no responsibility for any animal approved to live in housing and will not provide care or food for any animal including, but not limited to, removing the animal during emergency evacuation for events such as a fire alarm. Emergency personnel will determine whether to remove the animal and may not be held responsible for the care, damage to, or loss of the animal.

14. Housing and DSS must be notified if approved animal is no longer in residence on campus. Students may not replace or substitute a new animal (even if same breed) for the originally approved animal without a request to DSS, as each request is individually assessed (vet records would need to be obtained, etc.)

15. Students may be told to remove the ESA from University Housing for any of the following reasons (A warning may or may not be given based on the circumstances):

- Disruptive or out-of-control (aggressive behavior, excessive barking or otherwise disruptive behavior in the residence hall).
- Not house-broken or causing damage to any university property.
- Determined to be very ill, neglected, in need of immediate medical care, or to have a substantial lack of cleanliness or odor.
- Determined to be a direct threat to health and safety of others

Revised May 2022