**Acquiring a Service Animal**

**How do I know if a service animal is right for me or my loved one?** Making the decision to acquire a service animal is more complex than it may appear, and is best made after research, consideration and education. Some things to consider include the specific needs and limitations related to an individual’s disability, the amount of care required to manage the animal, the lifestyle of the individual, and a general desire to own and care for a service animal.

**What type of service animal do I need?** There are many types of service animals that assist individuals with disabilities with daily tasks. To help identify the type of service animal that is best for you or your loved one, make a list of things you cannot do because of your disability, or ways in which your disability prevents you from performing essential functions.

**How do I acquire a service animal?** There are many programs that raise, train and/or place service animals for individuals with disabilities. Each organization establishes their own criteria for placement, but you can ask for a copy of the criteria to determine if you qualify. It is important to understand that the service animal industry is not a regulated industry and there is no licensing and credentialing required of service animal trainers. Therefore, it is recommended that individuals do their own research to verify if the organization aligns with their needs. Please reference Iowa COMPASS Disability Resources Navigator (http://iowacompass.org/) for a list of organizations that may fit your needs.

**How do I know that the service animal has been appropriately trained and selected?** There are no universal standards or credentialing requirements for service animals or trainers.However, dogs who are candidates for service animal training usually pass screenings such as general aptitude and health, including consideration for age, physical health, temperament, breed characteristics, longevity, stewardship, and behavior. Service dogs can come from animal shelters, breed-specific rescue groups, breeding programs, and sometimes the owner’s household. The criteria vary among trainers and organizations, and cannot guarantee the overall quality of the service animal. Some individuals may decide to self-train their animals to perform specific tasks.

**What is the average cost of a service animal?** Each trainer and training organization determines their own fees. Some organizations provide service animals free of cost, while others may charge thousands of dollars for training and acquisition of the service animal.

**Will I have to provide records that verify my disability or income level?** Some organizations do require medical or financial information. It is within your right to ask how they will use this information.

**Are there organizations or programs that will provide financial assistance?** Some training organizations may offer scholarship opportunity or financial assistance towards a service dog. An individual should also research to see if their private health insurance or benefits (Medicare, Medicaid, VA) will contribute to the cost. Local charities, non-profit organizations, churches, businesses, and community or civic groups may also have opportunity for financial assistance.

**Are there any safety considerations when it comes to service animals**? Many safety tips that apply to all animals are good to keep in mind for service animals, especially since they are working animals. Things to keep in mind include temperature sensitivity (in both hot and cold weather), exposure to toxic substances (fertilizer, insecticides, or ice melt), preventing fleas and ticks, transportation safety (securing during car rides), and keeping the animal clear of bacteria or parasites (after dirt or

water exposure).

**What happens when a service animal is no longer able to work?** On average, service animals (most often, service dogs) work for approximately 8-12 years. When the animals are unable to continue work due to health condition or age, they are retired by the handler. If the handler is able and willing to keep the animal in the home, it becomes a personal pet of the handler or family. If not, and the animal was originally acquired through an organization, many will allow the retired animal to be returned for adoption. Some handlers find it difficult to keep the service animal as a pet, especially if they acquire another service animal in its place (also known as a “successor dog”), as the retired dog may become depressed or jealous of the new service animal.

**For more information:**

**Iowa Department of Human Rights**

**Office of Persons with Disabilities**

**Lucas State Office Building, Second Floor**

**321 E. 12th Street**

**Des Moines, Iowa**

**1-888-219-0471 (V/TTY)**

