**Service Animal Etiquette**

It is important to remember that a service dog is not a pet, and that their primary responsibility is to work for its handler. Petting, talking to, or distracting these animals without permission has the potential to disrupt them from doing their work and may put the handler in danger. Although many individuals enjoy talking about their service animal, they may not always have the time or ability to do so. Do not be offended if the handler denies your request for interaction while the animal is working. Here are some general guidelines when encountering a service animal team.

* Always assume the service animal is on-duty, even if he/she doesn’t appear to be actively performing a task. This includes when a service animal is resting, which is commonly seen when the hander is dining at a restaurant, in a meeting, engaging in a conversation, or in school.
* Do not distract the service animal in any way. Such distractions may include: petting, pointing, making disruptive noises (shouting, calling out, honking, clapping or making animal sounds such as barking), or allowing personal pets to interact with the service animal.
* Focus your questions and conversation directly to the handler, not the service animal.
* Do not ask the handler about his/her disability or make assumptions about their capabilities.
* Always ask permission from the handler if you wish to approach his/her service animal. If a handler denies your request, do not be offended. Although many handlers enjoy providing information about their service animals, there may be certain situations when this cannot occur. It is their right as the dog’s handler to decide on a case-by-case basis if petting and engaging with the animal is appropriate.
* Do not ask the service animal to perform a task.
* Do not feed a service animal, whether it is human food, pet food, or animal treats. Food has the potential to distract a service animal despite their training. In addition, some animals may require a specific diet or have allergies to certain food products.
* Do not take photographs or record video of a service animal without the permission of its handler.
* Do not assume that an individual who is with a service animal needs assistance. However, if you believe an individual is at risk, calmly ask if he or she would like help, which will give the handler the opportunity to accept or decline your offer.

**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)**

