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Bogus 'service animals' hurt the real thing

A proposed change to the Americans with Disabilities Act will stop the rampant proliferation of questionable "service animals" that have been reported about in the media recently. I am totally blind, a busy executive, reliant on my guide dog Kieran to navigate the physical world, and I welcome the coming changes to the ADA.

I have no objection to legitimate service animals, like Kieran, or the animals used by paraplegics and epileptics that help with daily tasks or warn of impending seizures. However, I do object to the sale of false national-service animal credentials to any and all comers. As comforting as pet owners find their animal companions, there is a distinct difference between that relationship and my relationship with my guide dog. Kieran is a working animal. He has serious and demanding duties to perform that must not be interfered with. Kieran was selectively bred and went through two years of rigorous training to qualify as a guide dog (and I took training, too, to earn the right to use a guide dog). I carry a card from Guiding Eyes for the Blind that shows we are a certified Guide Dog Team. We have a close relationship, a working relationship, and Kieran is not a pet.

Pet owners who fraudulently claim a disability to receive a service-animal permit are in effect stealing the rights of the disabled, such as bringing their canine into public places where pet dogs are not allowed. Too often the behavior of these under-trained pets reflects negatively on legitimate highly trained guide dogs and their disabled, usually blind, handlers. The ADA changes to eliminate frivolous service-animal designations are welcome and appropriate.

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