

# **OPINION: “Abuse of service animal ownership rules in greater New Bedford is getting out of hand”**

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“Things have been different since we came back from the pandemic. Listening to the kid’s speeches at my son’s Middle School Graduation recently really hit home how hard an experience it was for them, let alone the rest of us. It was a worldwide trauma and sadly many of us out there came back from it as people with less regard for citizenry and the common rules of society.

There is a selfishness that has washed over one particular group of people out there. Dog owners. Not all, but a sizable amount of them out there.

I’ll bet if you’re reading this you’ve probably seen people wandering around stores and supermarkets with their dogs recently. They clearly don’t appear to need a service animal, the dog itself is obviously just the family pet.

Dog owners all over the country since the end of the pandemic have embraced a loophole in service animal ownership rules and they use it to bring their dogs into any store or public

building they like.

It is against the law to ask to see proof that a service animal is actually a service animal. You can ask if the animal is a service animal and the owner can lie and say yes, after that there's nothing you can do. It is also not a law that the animal wear a vest to identify itself as a service animal.

Countless dog owners have learned this trick, I'm seeing more and more frequent complaint comments from all over the country on sites like Reddit bemoaning the same abuse of these rules and it's happening here in the New Bedford area as well.

Just yesterday in Stop and Stop, South Dartmouth I saw a man shopping who clearly was not in need of a service animal, wandering around with his medium to large size dog on a leash. It was clearly just the family pet and wasn't a service animal. This person knows full well the staff can't stop them bringing the dog in so they say F you to common decency and decorum and do whatever they like.

This abuse by dog owners puts workers in stores in the position where they are powerless to enforce the actual rules that animals should be left outside. It's selfish, unbearably rude to everyone else and potentially dangerous. Everyone thinks they know their dog inside out until it bites someone. Sooner or later, someone is going to get bitten or mauled on company property and then they've got a big legal mess to deal with.

The staff and businesses of New Bedford and elsewhere have their hands tied in this matter and these people know it. They are getting away with obnoxious societal selfishness and risking public safety.

I believe there needs to be a change in service animal ownership. The animal should have to wear a supplied vest in public clearly signaling the dog as a service animal and the owner of the animal should be supplied with an ID card that

identifies them as someone allowed to own a service animal.

We can clearly see who actually needs a service animal in this world. Of course, some animals are for emotional support rather than physical but the vest would be enough of a signal for people not to enquire and let's be honest, no one would care about showing the card if asked because it proves them right.

Until the rules are changed to stop them, these dog owners are going to continue to give the rest of us the metaphorical finger and take their animals wherever they like.

To our fellow citizens out there who are abusing these rules to bring your animals into stores and public buildings, you are the lowest of us, selfish and rude. Up your standards, leave your animal outside." -Anonymous.