

**PERSONNEL**  
**Series 4000**  
**Policy #4036.2.1**

**EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS (ESAs) IN THE WORKPLACE**

**Purpose**

This policy outlines the conditions under which employees may bring Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) into the workplace. While Connecticut law does not grant ESAs the same rights as service animals, EASTCONN recognizes the potential benefits ESAs provide for employees dealing with mental health challenges. The policy aims to balance these benefits with considerations for other employees' health, safety, and comfort.

**Scope**

This policy applies to all employees who wish to bring an ESA into the workplace. It does not cover service animals, which are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and have a separate policy. Approval for an ESA is considered on a case-by-case basis and does not imply permanent or universal allowance for ESAs in the workplace.

**Definitions:**

1. **Emotional Support Animal (ESA):** An animal that provides companionship, relieves loneliness, and may help with depression, anxiety, or specific phobias. ESAs are not specifically trained to perform tasks related to a disability.
2. **Handler:** The employee responsible for the care, supervision, and behavior of the ESA in the workplace.

**Request and Approval Process**

Employees must submit a formal request to the Director of Human Resources (HR) (or to the Executive Director in the absence of the Director of Human Resources) with all required documentation for prior approval. HR will review the request based on Connecticut laws, EASTCONN policies, and the specific needs of the workplace. Required Documentation:

1. Description of Animal: A description of the type of animal and the need for its presence in the workplace.
2. Medical Documentation: Documentation from a healthcare provider, dated within the last 12 months, confirming the employee's need for an emotional support animal to assist with a diagnosed mental health condition.
3. Schedule of Visits/Duration: State the date(s), time(s) and location of the visit.
4. Vaccination and health records: Verification that the ESA is up-to-date on vaccinations, is in good health, and has regular check-ups - a copy of the animal's vaccination record.
5. Insurance: Provide proof of liability insurance for any potential damages or injuries caused by the emotional support animal while on EASTCONN property. EASTCONN may hold the owner or handler of an emotional support animal liable for any property damage caused

by the animal to the same extent required by other EASTCONN policy or administrative regulations that impose liability for property damage. In addition, either the owner or handler, or both, may be liable for personal injury caused by the animal or related to the presence of the animal on school property.

6. Provide the city/town license for the animal.

The Director of Human Resources, in coordination with relevant managers, will review each request on a case-by-case basis to ensure it aligns with EASTCONN policy and legal requirements. EASTCONN may request additional documentation or clarification to assess the animal's suitability and the EASTCONN's ability to accommodate the request.

Upon receipt of all required documentation, the Director of Human Resources will inform the employee in writing of the decision within 10 business days, outlining any approved accommodations and expectations for the animal's presence in the workplace.

### **Requirements and Responsibilities:**

- **Limited Access:** Approved emotional support animals are permitted in designated areas only, such as private offices, break rooms, or specified wellness spaces. Emotional support animals may not be permitted in shared workspaces, conference rooms, cafeterias, or any area where their presence is determined to interfere with work or safety.
- **Conduct/Control:** ESA animals must be well-behaved, leashed (if required by the animal type), and under the handler's supervision and control at all times. If the handler cannot be present, the animal must leave the premises. They must not pose a distraction, create an unsanitary or unsafe environment and must not pose a threat to the health or safety of others disrupt workflow. Animals showing aggressive/inappropriate behavior, signs of illness, or lack of training will be required to leave immediately.
- **Animal Care:** Handlers are responsible for cleaning up after their emotional support animal and ensuring their animal's needs (e.g., water, bathroom breaks, any cleanup required) are met without disrupting work. EASTCONN will not provide food, care, or supervision for the animal.
- **Hygiene:** The animal must be clean and free of fleas, ticks, and other pests. The handler must ensure the animal's hygiene is maintained to prevent workplace health risks.

### **Considerations for Others**

- **Allergies and Phobias:** HR will conduct an assessment to ensure no employees in the immediate area have allergies, phobias, or medical conditions that could be aggravated by the presence of an emotional support animal. Reasonable accommodations will be made to support all employees.

- **Opt-Out Option:** Employees who prefer not to work near an emotional support animal for any reason can request a workspace adjustment.

### **Right to Restrict Access/Removal**

EASTCONN reserves the right to revoke emotional support animal privileges if:

- The animal behaves disruptively, aggressively, or unsanitarily.
- The handler fails to comply with policy requirements.
- The presence of the animal fundamentally alters the nature of a program or activity.
- Complaints from other employees indicate that the presence of the animal is adversely affecting the work environment.

### **Reporting Concerns**

Employees with concerns or complaints about an emotional support animal should contact HR. EASTCONN will address these concerns promptly, with respect for privacy and sensitivity toward all involved.

### **Confidentiality**

All information/documentation regarding an employee's disability and need for a service or support animal will be kept confidential and stored separately from personnel files, in accordance with ADA and HIPAA regulations.

### **Emergency Procedures**

In case of an emergency, employees with animals are responsible for ensuring the safety and evacuation of their animal, where possible. Emergency personnel should be informed of any service animals present.

### **Non-Discrimination**

EASTCONN prohibits retaliation or discrimination against any individual who requests an accommodation for an emotional support animal. All employees are expected to respect this policy and the rights of individuals requiring animal assistance.

### **Compliance with Other Policies**

This policy should be considered alongside EASTCONN's policies on health, safety, and workplace conduct. The Director of Human Resources will work with relevant departments to ensure fair accommodations for employees and animals. Nothing herein is intended to conflict with any rights or entitlements under applicable federal or state law.

### **Grounds for Denial**

A request may be denied if the animal presents an undue hardship, health risk, or significant disruption to workplace operations. Allergies, phobias, or other employees' concerns will also be considered, and additional accommodations may be made for both parties as needed.

### **Policy Review and Updates**

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Employees are encouraged to direct any questions or concerns to the Director of Human Resources.

(cf. Policy #5003.9.1 Service Dogs)

#### Legal References:

##### Connecticut General Statutes:

§ 10-220(a) Duties of board of education.

§ 10-231g Green cleaning program at schools: Definitions. Implementation.  
Notice.

Adopted: February 25, 2025

Revised:

Replaces: