

To Whom it may concern

This letter is written in response to your request for input into the subject of emotional support animals....

I love animals. The problem is that I am so highly allergic to animals that I can't go to a friend's house if they have a pet, I can't go near anyone who has been riding a horse (it is on their clothing) and sometimes I am even affected by people who own pets and have been playing with them. Yet, when I get on an airplane that has had anywhere from one to five pets on the previous flight or a similar number on my flight, I am held in a confined space with recirculating air and breathing in all the allergens that make me ill. I always take an antihistamine prior to flying and I carry an epipen. Unfortunately the antihistamine does not safeguard me from reacting to the animals, the unknown is how badly I will be affected. It is not as simple as a runny nose or itchy eyes, it usually means laboured breathing to some degree lasting for many days and sometimes results in a chest infection and just a few months ago I had pneumonia as a result of the chest infection.

Before the "emotional support" animal became popular I would only occasionally experience a legitimate service animal on the plane. In fact it was a surprise if there actually was an animal on a flight. Eighteen years ago I was on a few flights where I encountered the same two "service animals" (there were no "emotional support" animals then). A curious individual asked the owners (that is forbidden now) what service their animals provided. The answer was COMFORT. I am not sure why one person should be allowed comfort while another person becomes totally distressed. I empathize and sympathize with individuals who truly need an emotional support animal due to trauma either emotional or physical. In my opinion those people need a "service animal". So possibly there should be a standardized vetting of animals and their owners for emotional support certification and classification which would eliminate the frivolous abuse of the term and allow only those animals whose owners are in real need rather than everyone else who purchases online certificates to abuse the system. Surprisingly, some patients ask their physicians to write letters for them so that their pets can be classified as emotional support animals. When made aware of the problem that poses for other people on the flight who have allergies, some physicians are refusing to write these letters.

I think that it is totally unfair that animals are given priority over people with allergies. Peanuts are no longer allowed on planes and in school because of people's allergies. I was on a flight where there was an announcement asking everyone on board to please not unwrap any food items that contain any nuts as a person on the flight has airborne nut allergies.

BUT there is no consideration given to people who are allergic to animals and there is never an announcement that there are animals on a plane so that the allergic person can hopefully be prepared.

I am ecstatic that there is some concern and consideration of this problem that is getting out of hand. Not only are the types of animals becoming bizarre but the numbers are outrageous. I am hoping that your looking into this problem results in some greater control of service certificates and emotional support animals. If there was some control of this categorization and certification then it might allow all passengers, allergic or not, to relax when boarding a flight and know that they will remain healthy and be safe.

Thank you for taking the time to read this....