

Bus & Motorcoach News

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Industry News

Growing travel problem: Service animal fraudsters

Chicago—While pet lovers think it's cute to take their Fifi everywhere, service animal fraud is becoming "a nightmare" for bus companies, airlines, true animal handlers, bus and airline passengers and other businesses, reports Open Doors Organization, which provides training in dealing with service animals.

Open Doors points out there are no federal laws making service animal fraud a crime, but some states do have ordinances.

Since certification of service animals is not required in the U.S., enforcement is difficult.

So what's a bus operator to do when a customer has a pet in tow and says it's a service animal.

Even before such a customer shows up, operators should Google "service animal certification" and learn to recognize the fraudulent IDs, vests and other items for sale that owners often buy for their pets.

These pet IDs and outfits do not have to be accepted as proof the pet is a service animal since documentation is not required.

Instead, says Open Doors, ask questions.

"What tasks or functions does your animal perform for you?"

"What has it been trained to do for you?"

"Would you describe how the animal performs this task for you?"

The animal also has to be well behaved and under the control of the handler.

"Emotional support animals," often incorrectly called "therapy animals," do not fall under the federal definition of service animal since they are not trained to perform a task.

They do not have to be accepted into places of public accommodation unless allowed by a more broad state or local statute.

They also do not have to be transported, except by air carriers, which may require a letter from a licensed medical professional.