

Appalachian

STATE UNIVERSITY

Mary S. Shook Student Health Services

614 Howard Street
ASU Box 32070
Boone, NC 28608-2070
(828) 262-3100

Your request for a letter of support to have an emotional support animal (such as a dog) to present to your landlord or University Housing is a complicated matter.

Per the University's Animals on Campus Policy 303.24 3.3 Emotional Support Animal (or "Comfort Animal") means an animal selected or prescribed to an individual with a disability by a healthcare or mental health professional to play a significant part in a person's treatment process, e.g., in alleviating the symptoms of that individual's disability. An emotional support animal does not assist a person with a disability with activities of daily living, and does not accompany a person with a disability at all times. An emotional support animal is not a "Service Animal." 28 C.F.R. § 35.104

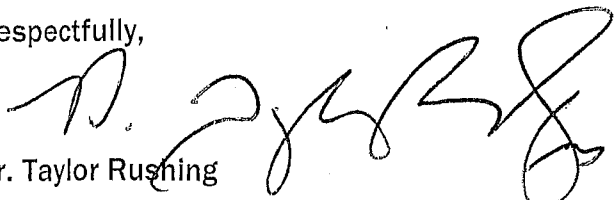
The medical staff at Student Health Service does not have the resources necessary to provide you with a VALID testamentary statement. Often, on-going mental health counseling is an expectation before any such letters are considered. On-line registration that "grants credentials" who have no contact with the student except for a single prepaid encounter that results in the documentation are generally not considered reliable for on-campus housing. The AppState Counseling Center for students does not provide such documentation either.

Rather, you should have your own therapist discuss whether or not she/he could provide you with sufficient documentation or you could contact the following local resource:

Suzi Woodard and Blue Mountain Center staff (828) 265 1455

(see attached letter)

Respectfully,



Dr. Taylor Rushing
Medical Director, Student Health Service

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Letters for Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) **BMCIH Standard Practice**

-- Phillip Cole, LCSW, LCAS, Deborah Tallarico, RN, LPC, Suzi Woodard, LPCS, and Tom Woodard, LPCS, LCAS are the BMCIH licensed psychotherapists available to consider writing letters for clients regarding emotional support animals.

-- The option to have an animal designated as an emotional support animal is part of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), for those with disabilities that interfere with normal life functioning.

-- In the letter, we are required to say that:

- you are a client of ours (i.e., of that individual therapist)
- we have spent enough time with you to confirm for ourselves that you have a legitimate psychiatric diagnosis that is listed in the DSM-5
- your diagnosis is one that constitutes a mental health disability, and it is one that could reasonably be helped by your being able to have this emotional support animal

-- In order to stand behind such a letter, in case one should be legally challenged, our policy is as follows:

- we must see you for at least 4-5 psychotherapy sessions
- we must see evidence of the psychiatric problem(s) as stated above
- you must understand that this diagnosis of a disability will be a part of your health record, which could follow you through future insurance and workplace confidentiality releases for the rest of your life.
- we cannot guarantee that after meeting for 4-5 sessions, we will provide the letter, although we will enter the process with that intention, and we will be honest with you about any concerns as we become aware of them

-- In addition, we are animal lovers concerned about the growing number of reports of individuals with ESAs who have made unwise decisions about the kind of animal chosen and/or their schedule and financial limitations as a person responsible for an animal. These situations have resulted in the animals becoming anxious and unhappy, which they show in making noise that causes distress for neighbors/roommates (annoying and raising concerns about the animals), and in scratching, chewing, and peeing/pooping in ways that cause damage to walls, doors, floors, carpets, furniture, and sometimes to themselves (again raising serious concerns about the animals' happiness and welfare).

-- Therefore, we will be asking you for a carefully thought-out plan for how you have chosen, or plan to choose, your ESA to fit your living situation and your lifestyle, and how you will be able to sustain appropriate care for this animal for the present and the foreseeable future. This is not part of the legal requirement for ESAs, but it is an ethical issue for us.

**If you are comfortable with these policies,
Phillip, Deborah, Tom, or Suzi would be glad to work with you.
Please contact us at the above email or phone number to set up an initial appointment.**

UPDATES or RENEWALS For **Emotional Support Animal (ESA) Letters**

The ESA letter is specific to the property owner or manager identified in the letter, and it is not transferable to anyone else.

So if you move to a new rental property, or sometimes even if you stay where you are and renew your lease, in a place that does not allow pets, **you will need a new letter** to define your animal as an ESA rather than a pet.

For the same reasons that we have the policies you read when getting your initial ESA letter, we may need to meet with you again, at least once or twice, in order to support the updated statements with the same content as before, i.e.,

- that you are a client
- that we have determined that you have a legitimate mental health diagnosis
- that we have reason to believe that an ESA will help alleviate the debilitating symptoms
- that we believe you are able to adequately take care of this animal

We hope you understand that we need to be able to back up our statements in our clinical records in case your claim for an ESA were ever to be legally challenged.

Blue Mountain Center Policies for ESA Letter Updates or Renewals

If your original ESA letter was written by a therapist who is not part of our Blue Mountain Center group, we will need to start from scratch in order to have the paperwork to support our letter for you. Please see the first page of this document.

Less than 6 months since your last appointment with us:

There is no need for additional sessions. Please just contact your therapist and discuss getting a new letter. You will need to provide the information about your new property manager/owner. Depending on your therapist, there may be a partial-session charge for the time spent writing the letter for you.

6 months to 1 year since your last appointment:

You will need to come in for **at least 1 therapy session** to discuss the previous diagnosis, symptoms, and triggers; to update us on your medications, if any; to report on your experiences with your ESA in helping mediate the symptoms and any problems with your ESA; and to share what skills you're using to manage your symptoms in addition to the support from your ESA.

1 year or longer since your last appointment:

You will need to come in for **at least 2 sessions** to explore the same issues as above.