

MEMO

Date: October 27, 2026

From: *Arron Richardson*
Arron Richardson, Ph.D.

Director, Accessible Education & Resource Center

To: JSU Campus Community, Faculty, Staff, Scholars, Alumni, and Visitors

Re: University No-Pet Policy & Service Animal Guidelines During 2026 Fall Commencement

As Jackson State University prepares to celebrate the academic achievements of our graduating scholars, the Accessible Education and Resource Center (AERC) would like to remind all graduates, families, faculty, staff, and guests of the University's policies regarding pets, Emotional Support Animals (ESAs), and service animals during commencement ceremonies. Our goal is to ensure a safe, accessible, and inclusive celebration while maintaining compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and applicable university policies. Please review the following guidelines before attending commencement:

Pets and Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)

Pets and Emotional Support Animals are not permitted at commencement ceremonies unless otherwise authorized under applicable law or university policy. Although ESAs may be approved in university housing, that approval does not automatically extend to commencement ceremonies or other public university events.

Service Animals

Jackson State University recognizes and respects the rights of individuals with disabilities who utilize trained service animals. In accordance with federal law:

- Trained service dogs are permitted in areas accessible to commencement attendees.
- Service animals must remain under their handlers' control and be housebroken.
- AERC does not require advance registration, medical documentation, or approval for service animal access.
- Service animals may be removed only under circumstances permitted by the ADA, including when an animal is out of control and the handler does not take effective corrective action.

When a service animal's purpose is not apparent, authorized university personnel may ask only whether the animal is required because of a disability and what work or task it has been trained to perform.

Accessibility Coordination

Graduates and guests attending commencement with service animals are encouraged, but not required, to contact AERC in advance. This voluntary communication allows our office to assist with accessibility arrangements and coordinate with commencement personnel when necessary. We also ask attendees to refrain from touching, feeding, or distracting working service animals. Jackson State University remains committed to ensuring that every graduating scholar and guest can participate fully in this important milestone. We appreciate your cooperation as we celebrate the accomplishments of our graduates and continue demonstrating the pride, tradition, and excellence of THEE Jackson State University. For questions regarding accessibility, service animals, or accommodations during commencement ceremonies, please contact the Accessible Education and Resource Center (AERC) at [601-979-3704](tel:601-979-3704) or adaservices@jsums.edu.