



# Emotional Support Animal (ESA) FAQ

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This document provides information about writing letters for ESA's.

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## Additional Resources for Staff

<a href="#">Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS)</a>	BBS website where info and updates for BBS licensees can be found.
<a href="#">Assembly Bill 468 (AB 468)</a>	Read the law on Emotional Support Animals.
<a href="#">QM Website</a>	Your one stop shop for QM resources.
<a href="mailto:HS_BHRS_ASK_QM@smcgov.org">HS_BHRS_ASK_QM@smcgov.org</a>	Got questions? Send them to Ask QM.

## Emotional Support Animals (ESA)

### 1. What's the difference between an "Emotional Support Animal" and a "Service Dog?"

An **"Emotional Support Animal"** provides emotional, cognitive, or other similar support to an individual with a disability and does not need to be trained or certified. A **"Service Dog"** is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability such as minimal protection work, rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, or fetching dropped items.

*(Fun Fact: At this time, only Dogs are recognized as Service Animals. Emotional Support Animals, sometimes referred to as comfort animals, are not intitled to the same rights and privileges as Service Dogs).*

### 2. Who can write a letter in support of an Emotional Support Animal?

Any health care practitioner (including Board licensees and registrants like Registered Associates) may write an ESA letter if all the requirements in question 3 below are met.

**3. I want to write an ESA letter for my client. What steps should I take?**

Make sure that you meet all of the requirements outlined in the BBS document [“Law Change Regarding Emotional Support Animals: What BBS Licensees need to know.”](#)

In summary, you...

- (1) must have a valid license,
- (2) must be licensed in the jurisdiction where the client is located,
- (3) have an established client-provider relationship for at least 30 days,
- (4) \*complete a clinical evaluation of the client regarding the need for an ESA,
- (5) \*provide verbal or written notice to the client that knowingly or fraudulently representing oneself as the owner or trainer of any dog licensed, qualified, or identified as a guide, signal or service dog is a misdemeanor violation of Section 365.7 of the Penal Code.

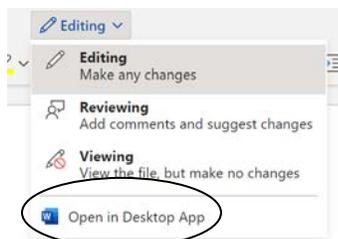
*(If you provide your client with an ESA letter, notify them that representing themselves as the owner of “Service Dog,” rather than an ESA is a misdemeanor. An Emotional Support Dog should not be represented as a Service Dog).*

**\*These should be documented in a progress note\***

**4. Where can I find a sample ESA letter?**

A sample ESA letter can be found [here on SharePoint](#).

Click on “Editing” and “Open in Desktop App.” This will take you to the version of the letter that includes the BHRS letterhead.



\*Contractors: Please email [HS\\_BHRS\\_ASK\\_QM@smcgov.org](mailto:HS_BHRS_ASK_QM@smcgov.org) to request a copy of the sample letter. Please put this letter on your own program letterhead.

**5. If my client requests an ESA letter, am I obligated to provide one?**

No. Only write your client an ESA letter if you feel it is clinically appropriate to do so. Be sure to document in a progress note that you evaluated the client for their need of an ESA and document how an ESA will benefit their treatment.

**6. I think my client would benefit from an ESA, but I haven’t been treating them for 30 days yet. Can I still write them a letter?**

No. The new law clearly states that there must be an established client-provider relationship for at least 30 days.

**7. Is there a specific evaluation tool I must use to evaluate my client’s need for an ESA?**

No, at this time there is no specific evaluation tool that must be used to evaluate the need for an ESA. Use your clinical judgement to determine if an ESA would benefit your clients presenting mental health symptoms. Document your rationale.