Recap of Air Travel - Guidelines and Policies Call on July 11, 2021

Hello Fellow Grads!

It was so nice to hear so many grads on the special call regarding the new Air Travel Guidelines and Policies enacted into law by the Department of Transportation (DOT) in February of this year.

A huge "thank you" to Becky Davidson for providing us with such valuable information. Becky - we truly appreciate your willingness to give of yourself and your time. You were a wonderful presenter and it is obvious you have been very busy during your retirement. Are you sure you actually retired? You are a true warrior and so vitally important to the visually impaired/blind community.

The main take away of the meeting was that the only thing that is consistent with the new guidelines is the inconsistency of it all -- and that to make the new system work, it is going to take all of us working together and being diligent with reporting any issues that we have with accessibility.

Based on the DOT decision, there are two forms that a passenger traveling with a service animal on domestic airlines may be required to complete. The first form required for all flights asks the traveler to swear that the animal is well-behaved and that any damage the animal causes will be paid for by the passenger. There is an additional form that is required for flights over 8 hours in length attesting to the fact that either the service animal will not need to relieve itself during the flight or if it does need to relieve itself, it will do so without creating a health or sanitation issue. It is important to remember that you will need to fill one or both forms out for each air carrier you travel with. If you are lucky, you will be assigned a number or code by the airline that you can use when traveling on that particular airline with your service animal during the following year (instead of having to fill out another form for each trip). However, you will need to fill out a new form or forms once the year is past, every time your guide dog gets a new Rabies vaccination and/or you acquire a new service animal.

The form or forms must be filled out by the passenger, or someone assisting the passenger (as opposed to the dog's vet). Guiding Eyes has been filling out the forms for new teams before they leave the school.

 Some of those participating in the call have reached out to their air carrier's Disability Services help desk for help with completing the forms and assistance has been inconsistent in this area as well. The DOT guidelines specify that the form must be filled out 48 hours in advance of flying, but this is not always possible. A passenger can fill the form/s out at the airport immediately prior to a flight. Some people reported that they would go through the trouble of completing the form/s and then get to the airport to find that no one ever asked to see the form/s.

It is very important that passengers having difficulties with any part of the process report accessibility issues. The Department of Transportation, and consumer advocacy agencies, are not going to know about the difficulties people are having (and the extent of the problem) unless people report every issue. Those who are working on changing the law or increasing accessibility to the form/s need to have specific examples of the problems individuals are encountering to help to enact change. There are a few different avenues one can go through to report accessibility issues.

One avenue is that you can e-mail Becky Davidson at beckyb1120@gmail.com.

You can file a complaint directly with the Department of Transportation at <https://airconsumer.dot.gov/escomplaint/ConsumerForm.cfm>. You can also contact National Association of Guide Dog Users (NAGDU) [www.nagdu.org](http://www.nagdu.org) or Guide Dog Users, Inc. (GDUI) <https://guidedogusersinc.org> to file a complaint.

As everyone can see, this is a complicated situation. The American Council of the Blind (ACB) and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) are both working tirelessly to make improvements. Solutions are not going to come quickly or easily and in order for positive changes to be made they need our help. Becky could not stress enough the importance of passengers reporting all accessibility barriers.

Thank you.

Guiding Eyes for the Blind

Graduate Council

gebgradcouncil@gmail.com