The American Service Dog Access Coalition (ASDAC), dedicated to ensuring access and inclusion for all service dog users, commends Secretary Chao and the Department of Transportation on the release of final rules governing travel by air with service animals.

“We applaud Secretary Chao and the DOT for recognizing the vital role service animals play in making travel more accessible for individuals with disabilities,” said Paul Mundell, ASDAC Executive Director. “These rules go a long way toward removing barriers to travel for all who are partnered with service dogs and we are gratified to see that many of the changes advocated by ASDAC have been incorporated into these rules.”

The DOT rules have aligned the definition of service animal with the definition adopted by the Department of Justice under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), that a service animal is a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability and that those tasks must be directly related to that disability. This definition recognizes that psychiatric service dogs, which are individually trained to mitigate the effects of an individual’s psychiatric condition, are trained service dogs. Under the new rules, emotional support animals (ESAs) will be treated as pets.

The new rule addresses rising concern with the dramatic increase in the number of incidents caused by ESAs on board aircraft in recent years. Reports of dogs biting humans, attacking legitimate service dogs, barking and acting aggressively and toileting on the aircraft highlight a threat to the safety of fellow travelers and cabin crew, and negatively affect the perception of service animals by the public. According to Mundell, “Both by explicitly anchoring unfettered access to air travel by qualified individuals with their service dogs and by discouraging the misrepresentation of untrained pets as service animals, these rules will ensure a better and safer travel experience for everyone.”

ASDAC, a 501(c)3 nonprofit, was formed to promote the full integration of service dog users into all aspects of society. As such, we strongly condemn the misrepresentation of untrained or behaviorally inappropriate animals as service dogs, as well as seeking service dog status when the person handling the dog does not have a disability. To that end, ASDAC, along with our partners, works across industries to educate the public on the benefits of service dogs and establish recognized, voluntary standards for service dog certification.

For more information, contact Mikki McGinnis 919-816-3321