

Dear Sir/Madam,

As a concerned citizen and frequent flyer in several airline programs, I am most concerned about the DOT's Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) that grants the airlines the right to charge a disabled passenger for an extra seat, put the dog in cargo or make the team get off the plane if the service animal cannot fit in the small space allotted directly in front of the passenger's seat.

During my college years, I worked for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the next decade was spent working for Eastern Airlines, and for the past 18 years I have been employed in the high-tech field as a Network Design Engineer for the telecommunications division of a major insurance company.

In the 10 years that I worked as an airport agent, I never had one problem accommodating a service dog on any flight! The animals were well behaved and the majority of passengers were not only accepting, they were actually pleased and excited to see the dogs working. Being the "boarding/ramp agent", responsible for the aircraft and passengers until officially turned over to the pilot, just before take off, it was my responsibility to juggle passenger seating for a variety of reasons. It happened on every flight, it was part of my job ... a person physically too large to occupy an emergency exit, some passengers traveling with unruly children, the tall basketball player who has no leg room, the business passenger who boarded with enough carry-on bags to sink a ship. Even a passenger wearing heavy aftershave lotion or perfume can be a problem that requires some negotiating ... especially if the person next to them has asthma.

During the past 18 years in the business world, I have spent a lot of time on airplanes, and been lucky enough to see service dogs in flight. Usually the people next to the dog are excited and happy ... some have even requested to change their seats to be near them. You need to understand that the majority of people in this country DON'T have a problem with service dogs ... they see them for what they are SERVICE DOGS ! There is a respect and awe ... and an understanding. Working for an airline, it is always your job to juggle to accommodate and you will always have your arrogant big mouthed, obnoxious complainers (they don't like the guys aftershave, yaddy, yaddy, yaddy) They will always find something to gripe about. But the rest of us understand, and respect service dogs and the important work they do !!

I couldn't believe this current proposal in front of you !!! I am appalled it is even being considered. Most of the passengers I have ever seen, would gladly allow a large service dog to use part of their leg space ! The dog needs to be with the person! Putting it in the cargo bin is NOT an option. I worked for the airline. A friend watched a plane take off from Kennedy Airport ... the cargo bin opened and as the plane banked, it dropped a trail of luggage out over the water. I have seen the insurance claims for animals which were left in their crates outside of airfreight and died. It takes years of training and thousands of dollars to make a service dog ... they are irreplaceable! And charging for the extra seat ??? Deploable concept. If I didn't know better, I would think this was a lobbied effort for the sole purpose of generating new revenue. The airline will get more bucks, but who is getting unfairly hurt ?? And I stress the word "UNFAIRLY". It is not right ... not right at all !

There is no reason this proposal cannot be re-written ... they can use the strategy that I saw used for the 10 years when I was employed in the airline industry. If there is an overcrowding problem it does not take much to shuffle and make everyone happy ... it is done every day ... on every flight. It may not

always be about a dog, but it is always "something" . Agents and flight attendants are used to it! It is NOT a problem.

Please excuse my long winded letter. With my busy schedule, I don't usually take the time and energy to get involved with things like this ... but when I saw the ludicrous proposal, I had to respond.

I urge you to do the "RIGHT" thing ... fix the wording and move on to concentrate on the truly important issues facing your department.

Sincerely,
Marian L. Beland