

U.S. will limit service animals on planes to dogs only

BY NEIL VIGDOR
The New York Times

The federal government gave its final approval Wednesday to a set of rules that clamp down on the types of service animals allowed on U.S. flights, reserving the designation for dogs and freeing airlines from having to accommodate a variety of emotional-support animals. The changes, which drew more than 15,000 public comments since the Department of Transportation proposed them at the beginning of the year, will take effect next month. They have kindled an intense debate among the airlines, advocates for people who rely on service animals and passenger-

rights groups, and came as a growing number of travelers have taken a variety of animals on flights in recent years. Most recently, transportation regulators had said that dogs, cats and miniature horses should be prioritized as service animals by airlines. But passengers have tried to travel with monkeys, birds and rabbits. Federal transportation officials said Wednesday that disruptions caused by taking unusual species aboard airlines had "eroded the public trust in legitimate service animals" and that there were increasing cases of travelers "fraudulently representing their pets as service animals." The new rules require airlines to treat psychiatric-service animals the same as

other service animals. The owners of those service animals must provide documentation developed by the Transportation Department attesting to the animal's health, behavior and training. Passengers traveling with service animals will no longer be required to physically check in at the airport instead of online. The new rules stopped short of banning emotional-support animals outright, but proponents said that airlines would no longer have to accommodate non-service animals in the cabin. The lobbying group Airlines for America, which includes all of the major U.S. carriers, welcomed the changes. "The Department of Transportation's final rule

will protect the traveling public and airline crew members from untrained animals in the cabin, as well as improve air travel accessibility for passengers with disabilities that travel with trained service dogs," the group's president, Nicholas Calio, said in a statement Wednesday. Some advocates for people with disabilities said the new rules were too rigid and did not take into account travelers with special needs. "There's a large number of people with intellectual and emotional disabilities that benefit from having that kind of support on a trip," Curt Decker, the executive director of the National Disability Rights Network, said in an interview Wednesday night. Decker said travelers with disabilities were being penalized because of other people abusing the system and that airlines had brought the problem on themselves by charging costly fees for transporting pets in cargo holds. "There's no one in the disability community that thinks a turkey is a service animal," Decker said.



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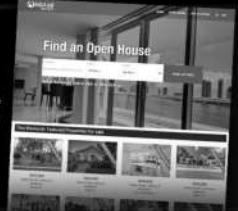
Tax-Burdened Northeastern Buyers Fueling Miami Real Estate

Since the pandemic set in, people from the Northeast have been flooding the region and absorbing Miami real estate inventory. Additionally, our international market is fueled by once-in-a-lifetime interest rates, which have shined a light on South Florida. Buyers are coming from New York, New Jersey, California and other states hard hit by the virus and expecting more quarantines. South Florida has the weather, quality of life, a place to avoid the winter and a better tax structure. In 2018, the Tax Cuts And Jobs Act was passed. The act limited itemized deductions on state, local, and property taxes to \$10,000. This was a big hit for New York area residents, where salaries, home prices and the mortgages that go with them can stretch into the millions. In addition to lower taxes, the pandemic is another catalyst for Northeastern consumers. COVID put people who had been on the fence the last decade about moving to South Florida over the top and ready to commit. According to real estate firm FCP and geospatial analytics group Orbital Insight, South Florida is the No. 4 top relocation destination for Americans who have moved during COVID. South Florida luxury real estate is seeing the largest increase in sales. Miami single-family luxury (\$1-million-and-up) transactions jumped 122.1% year-over-year to 171 sales in October 2020. Miami existing condo luxury (\$1-million-and-up) sales increased 27% year-over-year to 80 transactions. For buyers: come pre-qualified, work with an experienced agent and do your research to understand pricing— because you have to be aggressive. For sellers: with low inventory, low interest rates and an unpredictable future, right now is the perfect time to get top dollar for your property. Also, invest in a real estate professional that leverages technology since most showings are now virtual.

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UNEMPLOYMENT


But two other states that rolled out Deloitte-created unemployment systems around 2013 performed far better than Florida did, the federal data shows. New Mexico and Massachusetts were able to get initial unemployment payments out within three weeks about 68% of the time, above the national average. But both states improved their systems in ways that Florida officials didn't. Massachusetts moved its system to the cloud in 2017, allowing it to easily scale up to handle more claims.

New Mexico, like Florida, kept its system on its own servers, but it kept Deloitte on contract to make improvements to the system. "We have continued to reinvest in our system infrastructure, and as a result we were able to scale our system this year to address an exponential increase in claims caused by the pandemic," New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions spokeswoman Stacy Johnston said in a statement Thursday. Deloitte hasn't had any involvement with Florida's

unemployment system since its initial contract ended in 2015. Since then, the state has failed to make changes to CONNECT despite repeated warnings from state auditors that fixes were needed. The Department of Economic Opportunity is going to ask lawmakers next year for potentially tens of millions of dollars to either shift CONNECT into the cloud or replace the system. State Sen. Jeff Brandes, R-St. Petersburg, who on Thursday was named to a newly-created Senate committee to address pandemic issues, including unemployment, said DeSantis inherited a broken system. "Nobody thinks the unemployment system

worked well," Brandes said. "You had essentially total system failure for weeks on end, and a lack of leadership that required the governor to replace the executive in charge of the agency." But he partly defended Florida's poor performance when compared to New Mexico and Massachusetts, noting that Florida's size and tourism-driven economy made the crisis worse. More than 2.1 million Floridians have filed unemployment claims since mid-March, when the pandemic hit, compared to more than 1.6 million in Massachusetts. Contact Lawrence Mower at atlmower@tampabay.com. Follow @lmower3.

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