A Summary of The Service-Dog Law for Physically Disabled Persons
(Law No. 49; 29 May 2002)

Takemae Eiji
Tokyo Keizai University, professor emeritus

The law consists of seven chapters and 25 articles: Chapter 1-General Rules (Articles 1-2); Chapter 2-Training of Service Dogs (Articles 3-5); Chapter 3-Eligibility of Service-Dog Users (Article 6); Chapter 4-Accessibility by Service-Dog Users (Articles 7-14); Chapter 5-Certification of Service Dogs (Articles 15-20); Chapter 6-Ensuring the Hygiene of Service Dogs (Articles 21-24); Chapter 7-Penalties (Article 25).

The purpose of the Service-Dog Law is to promote the independent living and social participation of service-dog users. To this end, the government has implemented a series of measures designed to produce well-trained service dogs and ensure their smooth access to public facilities and transportation. These measures also define the duties of service-dog training providers and users (Article 1). The law defines service dogs as guide dogs for the blind, support dogs for the lame, and hearing dogs for the deaf (Article 2).

The service-dog training provider is required to select appropriate dogs as service animals and to train them for physically disabled persons with the assistance of medical advisors, veterinarians, and other specialists, based on the specific needs of the physically disabled (Article 3). Training providers must also monitor and provide follow-up training and other services for the dogs (Article 4). Service-dog users are required to: (a) control the service dog adequately so that it is not a nuisance to other people (Article 13); (b) avoid creating health hazards by keeping the dog clean and providing for vaccinations and periodic health checkups, etc. (Article 22); (c) have the dog wear the logo mark identifying it as specially trained to assist physically disabled persons (Article 12/a); and (d) maintain documents certifying that the dog is in good health and not a menace to public safety and present these to the concerned authorities upon request (Article 12/b).

Agents responsible for government facilities shall not deny service-dog users access to their facilities, workplaces, housing, etc. (Article 7). Agents responsible for public transportation shall not deny service-dog users access to airplanes, ships, trains, buses, taxis, or other public conveyances (Article 8). Agents responsible for non-governmental facilities shall not deny service-dog users access to their facilities (Article 9). Although access of service dogs to non-governmental workplaces and housing is not compulsory, private agents should make every effort facilitate the use of service dogs therein (Articles 10-11). Concerning accessibility, exceptions are made (a) when the dog causes noticeable damage to the facilities, (b) when the dog appears likely to cause bodily harm to others, (c) or when other reasonable cause exists.

Trained dogs are certified for service via incorporation procedures overseen by the Minister of Health, Labor, and Welfare (Articles 15-16). The Minister supervises the incorporation of training provider agents, requesting them to submit reports, conducting inspections, and issuing recommendations and orders (Articles 17, 19). If the agent of incorporation designated by the Minister does not comply with a recommendation or order, the Minister may withdraw the designation of incorporation or impose a civil penalty of 200,000 yen (Articles 18, 25). However, there is no penalty clause for violations of the right of access.
The central and local governments shall make every effort to publicize the importance of service dogs for the physically disabled through educational activities and public relations (Article 23). The general public shall also be urged to cooperate with service-dog users, according to their needs (Article 24).