# Debate Over Dogs in New York City Restaurants Sparks Controversy



In New York City, the issue of dogs in restaurants has drawn significant attention and differing opinions. According to the New York City health code, dogs are generally not permitted inside food service establishments, with exceptions for service animals and city-approved dog cafes like Boris & Horton. Despite this, many dog owners bring their pets into dining venues, a practice that has become increasingly common.

Beth Torin, a restaurant-safety consultant and former executive director of the Office of Food Safety for the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, noted that it is now quite common to see dogs in restaurants. The Americans With Disabilities Act allows staff to ask if a dog is a service animal and what task it performs; however, enforcing these rules can often lead to conflicts.

Samantha Leach, a writer and editor, frequently brings her Chihuahua-Pomeranian mix, Darcy, to West Village restaurants due to the dog’s anxiety when left alone. While many restaurants welcome Darcy, incidents involving unruly pets have occurred, such as a dog causing a scene by knocking over a table. Jeremiah Stone, co-owner of Bar Contra and Wildair, mentioned that the presence of nonservice dogs can disrupt the careful choreography of restaurant service.

Service dog owners express frustration, as impostors can lead to misconceptions about legitimate service animals. Olivia Jean Hamilton, an actor assisted by a mobility dog, highlighted this issue, stating that it adds anxiety to her dining experiences.

The New York City Department of Health disclosed that out of 20,781 restaurants cited last year, only 84 received violations for allowing dogs inside, indicating that enforcement may be lax. Shari Call, the owner of Simple Loaf Bakehouse, installed a sign to discourage patrons from bringing dogs, citing the potential fines.

Despite health code violations and potential health risks cited by the Food and Drug Administration, some restaurants continue to be unofficially dog-friendly, creating an unspoken understanding among patrons to keep a low profile. The ongoing debate reflects broader tensions between dog-loving diners and those concerned about health and safety regulations in New York City's vibrant dining scene.