



## Civil Rights Department

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### After Civil Rights Complaint, Inglewood Ice Cream Shop to Allow Service Animals

*State helps secure voluntary settlement to protect the rights of customers with disabilities*

**SACRAMENTO** – The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) today announced a voluntary settlement with La Michoacana Ricas Nieves ice cream shop in Inglewood after a customer was allegedly denied full and equal service as the result of a disability. As part of the settlement, the ice cream shop will update its policies on service animals and ensure staff are trained on state civil rights protections.

“Whether it’s losing out on a job or being denied service, discrimination can happen in nearly every aspect of our lives,” said **CRD Director Kevin Kish**. “But when people speak out, our department can help bring change. This case is a perfect example of someone exercising their rights and a business taking action to fix a problem and help ensure every customer feels welcome.”

#### Allegedly Denied Service

Last year, CRD received a complaint against La Michoacana Ricas Nieves from a customer who alleged that they were unlawfully denied service. According to the complaint, the customer entered the ice cream shop with their service dog and tried to make a purchase but was then told by the manager that service dogs were not allowed in the building. The customer said that they told the manager that service animals are required by law to be allowed in businesses open to the public, but the manager again allegedly stated that it was against the store’s policy. The customer eventually went back to the ice cream shop at a later date to see if they had changed the policy and was allegedly once again told that service animals were not allowed.

#### What Does the Law Allow?

Under state and federal law, businesses open to the public are required to [reasonably accommodate people with disabilities](#) to ensure full and equal access to the services that they provide. This includes allowing customers to enter a store with a service animal, even if the store has a general no pets policy. Service animals are trained to help people address specific aspects of a physical or mental disability. For example, guide dogs are animals that assist people who are blind with navigation and signal dogs are service animals that alert individuals who are deaf to sounds.

It is also important to note that these disabilities, whether physical or mental, might not be visible. In contrast to trained service animals, businesses are generally not legally required to accommodate

emotional support animals. However, businesses should exercise caution and sensitivity, as many disabilities are not immediately visible. It is also important to note that there are still numerous protections for people with disabilities who rely on emotional support animals, including [with respect to accommodations in housing](#).

### **State Mediates Resolution**

After conducting an initial investigation, CRD provided the customer and La Michoacana Ricas Nieves an opportunity to voluntarily resolve the allegations through mediation. As an alternative for parties that don't want to go to court, CRD offers neutral, trauma-informed mediation for civil rights disputes. Every year, these mediations result in policy change and millions of dollars in direct relief for Californians. As a result of the settlement, the ice cream shop, without admitting liability, will:

- Train all employees on protections for customers with disabilities, with an emphasis on requirements related to service animals.
- Provide written guidance to all staff on requirements under state and federal civil rights laws toward customers with disabilities and service animals.
- Designate a specific internal point of contact for staff on questions related to customers with disabilities and service animals.
- Post a sign indicating that service animals are welcome and remove any contradictory signs.
- Issue a formal apology to the customer who filed the complaint.

If you or someone you know has experienced disability discrimination, CRD may be able to assist you through its [complaint process](#). The department also [provides general information and factsheets online](#) about civil rights protections, including on [general disability-related civil rights](#) and [protections for customers at businesses](#). CRD also runs a [statewide pilot program called "Welcome In"](#) that any California business can apply to participate in to help cultivate safe and inclusive environments.

The settlement announced today was mediated by Attorney IV Mediator Mary M. Leichter. It was supported by Senior Staff Counsel Shilpa Ram and investigated by Rosaline Madrigal with CRD's Enforcement Division.

You can learn more by [reading a copy of the settlement](#).

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*The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) is the state agency charged with enforcing California's civil rights laws. CRD's mission is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state-funded programs and activities, and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit [calcivilrights.ca.gov](http://calcivilrights.ca.gov).*

