

HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
HB 102 - Real Property - Actions for Possession - Pet Protections

House Environment and Transportation Committee
January 31, 2023



Health Care for the Homeless supports HB 102, which would establish common-sense protections for families and their pets when facing eviction, such as providing owners with information about resources and where to find their pet if taken can protect families facing evictions. Unfortunately, many of our clients with pets face eviction and resources would be hugely helpful to manage that stressful situation.

Within the Housing Services Department, our job is to help clients get connected to housing, navigate the process of searching for and transitioning to permanent housing, and then we provide supportive services to help them maintain their housing placements. Sadly, we have seen many of our clients face eviction. In this scenario, if a client has a pet, one of the most detrimental effects can be the displacement and separation from their pet.

Many of the clients we work with often present with mental health symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, trauma-related symptoms, and social disengagement. There is extensive research that supports the therapeutic effect of animals with those who are experiencing mental illness. Pets can improve your mood, they can decrease anxiety, they can increase your social interactions, they can help you cope with stress more effectively, and they can offer comfort and belonging to a client population that often feels overlooked or discarded. As such, many of our providers recommend an emotional support animal for clients.

One client, Mr. Smith,¹ had a beloved dog, but when he suffered a stroke and lost his job, he experienced homelessness for three years. He had to stay in a shelter that would not allow dogs. Luckily his dog was able to stay with a friend until he was able to find permanent housing. In 2021, Mr. Smith was matched to permanent housing with supportive services through Health Care for the Homeless. One of his biggest goals was to be able to reunite with his dog in his new home, which he did. His health dramatically improved. He can now take his dog for walks and no longer needs his walker. He enjoys introducing his dog to neighbors on their walks, which has increased his social engagement and sense of belonging in his new neighborhood. He is able to remain calm and cope with stressful situations much more effectively now that he has his dog back in his home.

Mr. Smith is lucky. Unfortunately, that is not the case for many of our clients who are faced with the devastating situation of an eviction and no resources for their beloved pets, forcing them to potentially put their pets in unsafe and unsecure situations. It would be very helpful to have a compiled list of resources to aid people facing eviction with finding their pet safe shelter. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 102.

¹ Pseudonym used for confidentiality purposes.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Our mission is to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it. We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.