



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

February 21, 2024

Budget and Tax Committee
SB 779

*Real Property – Taxation of Vacant Property, Certification of Company Representatives,
and Short-Term Rentals*

FAVORABLE

The Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our supporters in Maryland, supports HB826/SB779. This legislation would provide more tools for local governments to tackle vacant housing, as well as ensure that communities in need of affordable housing are not seeing affordable rental housing stock divested in favor of short-term rentals.

Housing security is essential for keeping people and pets together. The recent surge in pet surrenders overwhelming our shelters is due in large part to the housing crisis facing Marylanders. This connection is documented in a recent Baltimore Banner article, which states: “trouble finding affordable housing that allows pets is now the most common reason animals are surrendered at Baltimore-area shelters.”¹

A record number of households and nearly three-fourths of renters have pets, and while a majority of Americans consider their pets to be family members many tenants say they have trouble finding “pet friendly” properties. One explanation found by a recent industry report showed that although 76 percent of owner/operators say their properties are pet-friendly, 72 percent of residents surveyed said that pet-friendly housing is hard to find, and 59 percent say it’s too expensive.²

The lack of pet-friendly, affordable rental housing is felt acutely in communities that have historically seen disinvestment and redlining. When affordable rental units are used for short-term rentals, it takes away secure housing opportunities from community members who desperately need them.

Vacant housing poses unique challenges for animals. Strays, lost pets, and unowned animals may find shelter in these units, but they are not necessarily safe or appropriate for animals to squat in. Even worse, animal control officers (ACOs) do not necessarily have the authority to enter the building to retrieve or humanely trap the animal, and if the owner of the vacant unit is not publicly listed the ACOs cannot even seek permission to do so. This creates situations that can be hazardous for animals and people, as without access ACOs are not able to ensure animals in these buildings receive the vaccinations (including rabies and distemper) that they need.

Stable, secure rental housing is critical for our families and our companion animals. The tools that HB826/SB779 will provide local governments will help families seeking housing and ACOs seeking to protect animals in our communities, and we urge a favorable report.

¹ [How bad is Maryland’s housing crisis? Check the animal shelters - The Baltimore Banner](#); January 20, 2024

² “2021 Pet-Inclusive Housing Report.” Michelson Found Animals and HARBI. Accessed January 31, 2022.
<https://www.foundanimals.org/pets-and-housing/2021-pet-inclusive-housing-report/>.