



**HUMANE
RESCUE
ALLIANCE**
Animals. People. Community.

February 15, 2022

Budget and Tax Committee
Maryland State Senate
11 Bladen St
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Humane Rescue Alliance SUPPORT for SB 443

On behalf of the Humane Rescue Alliance and our thousands of supporters in Maryland, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 443, which aims to prevent further displacement of vulnerable families and keep pets with the families who love them by incentivizing pet inclusive housing through the creation of a tax credit for owners of rental housing who allow dogs and cats in their rental properties without non-refundable pet fees or breed or size restrictions.

The Humane Rescue Alliance honors more than 150 years of commitment to protecting animals, supporting families, and advocating for positive change to create a world where all animals can thrive. Located in Washington, DC, we are the largest animal services provider in our region, touching the lives of over 100,000 animals annually through adoption, community veterinary care and other support services, and lost pet reunification. Last year, we adopted out over 4,000 animals to Maryland families.

Restrictive pet rental policies increase housing insecurity and break up families

Homelessness and housing insecurity are at an unparalleled level as millions of renters became behind on rent payments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.ⁱ As thousands of Marylanders face difficulty in finding safe and affordable housing for their families, restrictive rental policies for pets and exorbitant pet fees add to the barrier that renters face.

In addition to pet security deposits, rental properties that allow pets often include additional monthly pet fees, despite the fact that research shows that in the instances in which pet-related damages occur, security deposits are more than sufficient to cover costs in most cases.ⁱⁱ According to an analysis of pet fees and rental housing published in 2021, pet charges beyond a security deposit add to the financial barriers that low-income tenants already face when trying to find housing, and unreasonable pet fees lead to poorer housing security among already disadvantaged and marginalized populations.ⁱⁱⁱ

Even when owners can afford to pay the additional costs associated with having a pet in a rental property, policies restricting dog breed and weight effectively eliminate a large percentage of family dogs from living in most rental units. According to a survey of 551 owner/operators in urban and suburban settings, while 76% of owner-operators consider themselves pet friendly, just 8% of rental housing is free of pet restrictions, with breed and weight restrictions being the most common.^{iv} With weight restriction for dogs in the rental-housing world averaging 25-45 pounds, many of the most popular family dogs, from Labradors to Golden Retrievers, are excluded from properties with these arbitrary limits. Looking at the dogs available for adoption from our DC shelter on February 10, 2022, of the 54 dogs in our care awaiting adoption, only 11 are under 45 pounds. One is under 25 pounds.

Additionally, restrictive pet rental policies crowd animal shelters with pets who have loving families who want to care for them but are unable to find safe and affordable housing that allows for their animal companions, forcing families to make the devastating choice to give up their pet or give up a home. Extensive analysis of 1.1 million U.S. cat and dog owner surrenders spanning January 2018 through September 2020 identified housing issues as one of the most frequently cited reasons why people relinquish their pets to animal shelters.^v This is born out in our state, and our publicly funded county animal shelters must use their limited resources to care for these animals who have loving families who would like nothing more than to be able to continue caring for their beloved pet. Given the challenges pet owners face to finding affordable housing that allows for their pets, an estimated 20% of owners make the choice to keep their pets in rental units illegally rather than surrendering them to an animal shelter, opening themselves up to the possibility of eviction and its subsequent long-term implications for health and security.ⁱⁱ

Pets make life happier and healthier for people and communities

Everyone deserves access to the well-documented benefits of the human-animal bond. According to the American Pet Products Association's National Pet Owners Survey for 2021-2022, pet ownership has increased to an estimated 70% of U.S. households that own a pet,^{vi} and studies consistently show that the vast majority of people consider pets to be an important member of the family.^{vii}

The tremendous surge in pet adoption and fostering during the pandemic has underscored the value and importance of the human-animal bond. According to the CDC, the bond between people and their pets is linked to several health benefits including decreased blood pressure, cholesterol levels, triglyceride levels, feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and symptoms of PTSD. Studies also show pet ownership increases opportunities for exercise and outdoor activities; results in better cognitive function in older adults; and creates more opportunities to socialize.^{viii}

For these reasons, we enthusiastically support SB 443, which creates a 2-year sunsetted program to provide a \$200 per unit income tax credit (capped at \$2,000/owner) to owners of rental housing who allow dogs and cats in their rental properties without non-refundable pet fees or breed or size restrictions. Refundable, reasonable pet deposits would not exclude owners from accessing the tax credit.

We respectfully request a favorable report for SB 443, because no one should have to make the devastating choice between their pet and a home.

Emily Hovermale
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Humane Rescue Alliance

ⁱ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/07/07/twice-as-many-us-renters-fell-behind-on-payments-during-the-pandemic>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2752/089279305785594270>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2021.767149/full>

^{iv} <https://www.foundanimals.org/pets-and-housing/2021-pet-inclusive-housing-report/>

^v <https://network.bestfriends.org/research-data/research/owner-surrender-acquisition-source-analysis>

^{vi} https://www.americanpetproducts.org/pubs_survey.asp

^{vii} <https://habri.org/international-hab-survey/>

^{viii} https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/keeping-pets-and-people-healthy/how.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fhealthypets%2Fhealth-benefits%2Findex.html