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The Maryland House of Delegates
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Delegate Dana Stein Support HB 1064

Landlord-Tenant – Requirements Relating to Pets - Evictions

Chairman Barve and Fellow Committee Members:

We've heard many bills in recent years related to various situations surrounding tenant evictions. But there is one situation we have not considered before: What happens to the pets—particularly dogs and cats—when a tenant is evicted and all of their belongings put out on the street? Legally, a landlord or sheriff carrying out the eviction, cannot put an animal out on the street to become a stray. Many are conscientious and will call animal control to pick up a pet. But often, they don't realize an animal is in the apartment/house being vacated. That pet is then left to starve to death. And, when an animal is saved by animal control, the family often never finds out where it was taken.

A record number of households and nearly three-fourths of renters have pets, and a majority of Americans consider their pets to be family members.

Since the pandemic began, with so many of us experiencing unparalleled isolation, the importance of companionship cannot be overstressed; and certainly for someone who is already facing the trauma of losing their housing, the added trauma of being separated from their pet is unimaginable.

This bill establishes basic guardrails to protect pets and inform pet owners what may take place when an eviction happens. The bill includes 4 basic provisions:

- The Department of Agriculture must create a fact sheet with resources for pet owners facing evictions, such as options for caring for your pet and how to contact your local shelter; that fact sheet must be provided to tenants who have pets and to all tenants who are facing eviction.
- After an eviction, the property must immediately be checked for pets and those pets should be either reunited with the owner or taken to the local shelter.
- Should a pet be taken to a shelter, the shelter should have the name and contact information of the owner and the owner should be given information about the shelter.
- No pets can be left with property on the curb after an eviction.

Every one of the provisions in this bill comes from heart-wrenching stories advocates have heard from shelters and rescue partners, as well as from housing advocates, regarding situations they directly witnessed. While these practices seem common sense, and many jurisdictions and landlords do many of these practices voluntarily, we want to ensure that these are codified statewide. These practices are not onerous; they can be implemented through existing local procedures, and they create a necessary level of protection for pets and their owners.