



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

February 16, 2022

Ways and Means Committee

HB681

Income Tax - Credit for Pet-Friendly Rental Dwelling Units

FAVORABLE

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), on behalf of our Maryland supporters, strongly supports House Bill 681, which will serve to protect the bonds between Maryland renters and the pets that are important members of so many of our families.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, in the face of an unprecedented public health emergency, our nation took immediate action to keep families stably housed by swiftly enacting eviction moratoriums and funding emergency rental assistance—critical tools that helped keep families and their pets at home. Likewise, many organizations, including HSUS, helped by supporting vulnerable communities and delivering vital services to pet owners including affordable, accessible veterinary care, supplying pet food and resources, and by advocating for pet-inclusive subsidized housing because a deep connection with pets transcends boundaries of socio-economics, race, ethnicity and geography, and no one should be denied the opportunity to experience the benefits, joy and comfort that come from the human-animal bond. Despite assistance at all levels of government, many renters find difficulty securing housing suitable for their entire family.

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. The scarcity in properties that welcome all pets is often associated with policies that include arbitrary restrictions such as breed, weight and number limits that create unnecessary barriers for pet-owning tenants. To the detriment of many owner/operates, this disconnection is a hindrance and leaves money on the table as vacant units in pet-inclusive properties fill faster than those in non-pet-friendly housing and on average, residents stay 21 percent longer.

The study found additional financial benefits as well, including that fewer than 10 percent of all pets cause damages of any kind and the average pet deposit will cover any damage that is caused.

Now more than ever, with so many of us experiencing unparalleled isolation, the importance of companionship cannot be overstressed. S.B. 443 will incentivize housing providers to welcome families and their beloved pets and will help relieve common restrictions that disproportionately impact low-income households. In Maryland, 33% of households rent their homes and approximately 16 percent of renters are behind on their rent. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), a person earning minimum wage would have to work 82 hours each week to afford a modest, 1-bedroom rental home at fair market rent in Maryland. In addition to creating more pet inclusive housing, HB681 will provide valuable tax credits to housing providers during these times of economic uncertainty.

All in all—pet-inclusive properties are not only good for tenants, but they're good for housing providers. This bill is a thoughtful and compassionate use of our public subsidies setting reasonable requirements all while benefiting our communities and making them more humane. We thank the committee for consideration of this important legislation and urge your support of HB681.