



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

March 7, 2023

Environment and Transportation Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen St
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 1039 - Task Force on Financial Incentives for Pet-Friendly Housing

Dear Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Honorable Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

On behalf of the Humane Rescue Alliance (HRA) and our supporters in Maryland, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1039, legislation which aims to find solutions to prevent further displacement of vulnerable families and keep pets with the people who love them.

HRA 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. We are the largest animal services provider in the Mid-Atlantic 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 helped over 4,000 Maryland families find their animal companion.

Restrictive pet rental policies increase housing insecurity and break up families.

As thousands of Marylanders face obstacles 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. 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 **inflated pet fees lead to poorer housing security among already disadvantaged and marginalized populations.**ⁱ

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 size restrictions being the most common.ⁱⁱ **When weight restriction for dogs in the rental-housing market average 25-45 pounds, many of the most popular family dogs, from Labradors to Golden Retrievers, are excluded from properties with these arbitrary limits.**

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.ⁱⁱⁱ

In Maryland, our publicly funded county and municipal animal shelters bear the costs, using their limited resources to care for these animals who have 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.ⁱ

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 with a pet,^{iv} and studies consistently show that the vast majority of people consider pets to be an important member of the family.^v

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.**^{vi}

No one should have to make the devastating choice between their pet and a home. We respectfully ask the committee to give HB 1039 a favorable report and start the process of identifying solutions to the growing problem of families unnecessarily separated from their animal companions. Thank you for your consideration.

Emily Hovermale
Director of Government Affairs

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

ⁱⁱ <https://www.foundanimals.org/pets-and-housing/2021-pet-inclusive-housing-report/>

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

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

^v <https://habri.org/international-hab-survey/>

^{vi} 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