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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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SB 896 – Pet Policy Transparency Act

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, members of JPR.

For most of us, pets are like family. Surrendering a beloved pet to a shelter would be the option of last resort in difficult circumstances. Yet, unfortunately, animal shelters in Maryland are filling up with pets at an alarming rate due to housing-related issues.¹ There is a growing link between the housing crisis (particularly affordable housing) and the homeless pet crisis.

SB 896 seeks to help keep people and their pets together by requiring more transparency from landlords in communicating their rental unit pet policies. It requires the landlord of any residential rental property to link to the pet policy on their website, in digital advertising, and on rental search engines as well as include the policy with the rental application, stating up front *any*: specific breed or weight restrictions; required fees; limits on number; and vaccination, liability insurance, or additional requirements.

One of the major challenges an individual or family can have when trying to find rental housing that will allow their pet, is simply determining the complete pet policy. While a building may be listed as “pet friendly”, late in the application process, a prospective tenant can learn, for example, that their pet isn’t allowed due to breed or weight restrictions, leading to the loss of a security deposit, precious time in a competitive housing market, or, in a worst-case scenario, their precious pet. This situation is particularly challenging for lower income households who have fewer options. In conducting research for this bill, our advocate Jessica Simpson of Humane World for Animals found that out of 400 low-income housing listings in Maryland, 67 (17%) indicated they accepted pets. Of those, 47% required a call to inquire about their pet policy, an often-cumbersome process that can result in misinformation. Making all rental unit pet policies transparent can help keep more animals out of shelters and with their owners.

For these reasons, I respectfully request your favorable report on SB 896.

¹ <https://www.thebaltimorebanner.com/community/housing/maryland-housing-crisis-animal-shelters-pets-adoption-77A2ZPFG4JBYPMCJJTVRSLKR4/>

