

Addressing Barriers to Pet-Inclusive Housing

Pets are an indispensable and beneficial part of the Washingtonian household. Nearly two-thirds of our residents have pets. These families know that, at times of stress, such as during financial or housing instability, pets provide vital emotional support. The bond between pets and people also provides so many tangible benefits – scientific evidence shows that pets can decrease blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels; and loneliness; and increase physical activity and socialization.



Despite the popularity of pets and the benefits they provide, an increasing number of pet owners are finding it challenging to find housing that accommodates their four-legged family members due to restrictive and/or costly policies. These policies can have devastating effects on both pets and their people.

A national study conducted by the ASPCA revealed that those who rent are more likely to need to rehome their pets for housing-related issues than for any other reason. Sadly, these consequences are being felt by animal shelters and rescues throughout the state as they reach and exceed capacity.

One common housing challenge that renters face is exorbitant and non-reimbursable pet deposits, pet rent, and pet fees. These additional costs tend to affect lower income renters at a much higher rate than those of moderate or high incomes. In many cases, these are the very people that can benefit most from having pets as part of their family and can least afford the

additional costs. Pet deposits and fees that are required prior to occupancy can be particularly taxing for renters that are already financially stretched by moving costs.

97% of pet owners consider their pets family, but nearly 90% of landlords don't allow pets or have significant restrictions, forcing many renters to choose between housing and their pets. According to an apartments.com survey of 3,000 renters, close to 80 percent of respondents said they were required to pay a pet deposit or other costs to include a pet in their household.

While some landlords believe that all pets will create significant damage, recent studies have found that there is little, if any, difference in damage between tenants with and without pets. Only 9% of pets are reported to cause any damage whatsoever, and the average damages are only \$210. Furthermore, only 2% of pets caused damage requiring a security deposit deduction, with the majority of pet owners paying out of pocket to fix any damages. Research shows that pet-owning residents are paying an average of \$857 in combined security and pet deposits, an average of \$244 onetime pet fees, and an average of \$600 annually in monthly pet fees. (HABRI and Michelson Found Animals, [2021 Pet Inclusive Housing Initiative.](#))

Senate Bill 6064 (Hansen) will reasonably limit the amount of pet deposits that can be charged and will prohibit pet rent and pet fees that can be charged for a new or existing tenant. Removing these housing barriers for pet owners is an important step to ensure that all families can experience the many benefits of pet ownership and will create more equitable, pet inclusive housing and keep families – and their pets – together.

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