



May 31, 2019

Councilmember Paul Koretz, Chair
City of Los Angeles City Council
PAWS Committee
200 N. Spring St., Room 440
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Via Electronic Communication

RE: Council File 18-0350 - Pet-Friendly Housing Ordinance

Honorable Chairman Koretz and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), I am writing to express our support for Council File Item 18-0350 to amend the City's Municipal Code to allow tenants to possess pets in publicly-financed residential rental housing (Ordinance). The Ordinance would create new pet-friendly housing for households struggling with a choice of keeping a roof over their head and relinquishing their pet to a shelter. We thank you for your leadership in acknowledging the significant role that the City can take in avoiding this grim decision.

Founded in 1866, the ASPCA was the first humane society to be established in North America and is today one of the largest in the world. The ASPCA believes that pets and people belong together; that financial circumstances alone are not reliable indicators of the capacity to love and care for a companion animal, and that strong bonds between people and pets make for stronger communities. Unfortunately, every year tens of thousands of dogs and cats are relinquished to California's animal shelter due to housing-related issues. From our direct care of companion animals, our work with animal welfare agencies, veterinarians, law enforcement and policy makers and our own research, we have learned that there are a variety of challenging circumstances that can cause pets to lose their homes. Poverty, short term emergencies, illness, lack of affordable, accessible vet care, and a shortage of pet friendly housing can conspire to force even the most devoted pet owner to relinquish a beloved pet to a local shelter or rescue group.

A recent law journal article focused on the Los Angeles region finds that renters today face widespread landlord-imposed pet restrictions.¹ As homeownership declines and renting becomes the norm for the majority of households, landlord-imposed pet restrictions increasingly constrain choices, effectively reducing access to housing for many families with pets. The note further finds that these policies particularly impact low-income families and those with socially maligned dog breeds.

The Los Angeles experience is unfortunately not unique. A national study conducted by the ASPCA revealed that those who rent are more likely to need to rehome their pets for housing issues than for

¹O'Reilly-Jones, Kate, [When Fido is Family: How Landlord-Imposed Pet Bans Restrict Access to Housing](http://jlsplaw.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/04/Vol52-OReilly-Jones.pdf), Columbia Journal of Law and Social Problems 52:3, 427-472. <http://jlsplaw.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/04/Vol52-OReilly-Jones.pdf>.



any other reason.² Furthermore, a primary housing issue cited by families relinquishing is financial eviction from their current housing and a lack of suitable pet-friendly alternatives in the rental market. For example, in Los Angeles, housing was a reason given for roughly 23 percent of dog surrenders and 19 percent of cat surrenders between 2011 and 2015. This equates to approximately 30,000 dogs and cats being surrendered each year in Los Angeles alone. Historically, 50% of these pets will ultimately be euthanized.

The Ordinance would require that housing units financed by the City be pet-friendly. This would result in much-needed pet-friendly housing being added to the market and would build on and complement the strong commitments of both the federal and state governments in supporting pet-friendly housing opportunities. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has required all of its public housing and all HUD-insured and/or –financed housing for senior or disabled households to be pet-friendly since 2000 and 2008 respectively.³ In addition, the State of California passed a law in 2017 to require that all housing financed by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to allow pets. The City’s commitment to pet-friendly housing would maximize the number of pet-friendly option for Los Angeles residents and reduce intake pressure on City animal shelters resulting from housing-related relinquishment.

A primary reason that both the state and federal governments have made significant commitments to pet-friendly housing is an acknowledgement that allowing pets is a significant way to contribute to the overall well-being of the families living in affordable housing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, pets have positive impacts at nearly every stage of life.⁴ Pets influence social, emotional, and cognitive development in children, promote an active lifestyle, and have been able to detect oncoming epileptic seizures or the presence of certain cancers. Research has shown that cats provide emotional support, improve moods, and contribute to the overall morale of their owners. Cats are also credited with promoting socialization among the elderly and physically or mentally disabled people. Furthermore, people with pets tend to have lower blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels. These benefits are consistent with goals to holistically address the social, economic, and health outcomes for residents of affordable housing. As such, pet-friendly housing promotes happier and healthier families, better futures for the family pet, and a reduced financial burden to animal shelters and the public.

According to the HCD, California’s ongoing housing crisis “is worse than ever.”⁵ HCD’s recent report, “*California’s Housing Future: Challenges and Opportunities California*”, states that housing production has averaged less than 80,000 new homes annually over the last 10 years, and ongoing production continues to fall far below the projected need of 180,000 new homes annually. Furthermore, home ownership is at its lowest level since the 1940s.

² Weiss, E., Gramann, S., Spain, V., & Slater, M. (2015). Goodbye to a good friend: An exploration of the re-homing of cats and dogs in the U.S. *Open Journal of Animal Sciences*. 5: 435- 456.

³ Pet Ownership in Public Housing, 24 CFR 960, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/24/part-960/subpart-G> (March 29, 2000); Pet Ownership for the Elderly and Persons With Disabilities, 24 CFR Part 5, Subpart C, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/24/part-5/subpart-C> (Nov. 26, 2008).

⁴ Healthy Pets Healthy People, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/health-benefits/index.html> (April 30, 2014).

⁵ Liam Dillon, The Los Angeles Times, <http://www.latimes.com/politics/essential/la-pol-ca-essential-politics-updates-california-housing-affordability-1483490282-htlmstory.html> (Jan. 3, 2017).



The lack of supply of new housing has resulted in historically low vacancies and high rents in the rental market. While renters may have difficulty finding suitable housing options in the market, those households with pets are confronted with an even greater challenge. The tight rental market means landlords can be more discerning in the types of households they rent to and often exclude potential tenants with pets.

One reason for this may be that many landlords have an unsubstantiated belief that households with pets will become a financial or social burden for their communities. In fact, a recent study found that there is little if any difference in damage between tenants with and without pets and, in fact, there are a number of benefits that both landlords and the community realize when pets are allowed.⁶ While some issues can arise within a community with pets, many can be addressed through property design and the tenant intake process. In fact, with some forethought, the presence of pets can become a means for building community within a development. The ASPCA stands prepared to assist the City as it considers and adopts best practices for developments being financed and constructed under the proposed pet-friendly policy.

The City has at its discretion the ability to open up much-needed pet-friendly housing opportunities, strengthen communities and families, and improve public health outcomes for those households affected. We respectfully request your support for this Ordinance forward so that fewer households are faced with the difficult decision of giving up their pet and keeping a roof over their head.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Riggs', written in a cursive style.

Susan Lea Riggs
Senior Legislative Director, Western Region

⁶ *Companion Animal Renters Study: The Market for Rental Housing for People with Pets*, The Pet Savers Foundation, <https://www.petfinder.com/dogs/living-with-your-dog/pet-friendly-housing-study/> (2004).