



# Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative

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## Operator Case Study

### The Company: PMG Property Management

#### Overview: PMG Maintains Long Standing Pet-Inclusive Policies Amidst Change Management

*Faced with the possibility of implementing size and breed restrictions, new leadership recognized the value of leaning into existing inclusive policies, keeping pets and their people together.*

PMG Property Management is a leading multifamily housing operator focused on asset management and investment of commercial real estate throughout the western United States and specializing in well-located, Class B and Core Plus multifamily housing with high value-add upside. Having successfully rebranded in November 2022, PMG simultaneously brought Jessica Fern-Kirkland on board as president; with over 15 years of experience in the rental housing industry, she is bringing her personal “rocket ship” brand of leadership to the organization’s ‘#PMGPROUD’ future. It’s this brand of forward-thinking, high-expectation stewardship that led Jessica and her team to embrace the company’s long-held inclusive pet policies when faced with the prospect of implementing industry-standard restrictions.

#### A Forward-Thinking Approach

PMG falls among only 8% of rental housing providers that do not have size and breed restrictions for pets on their properties. When PMG’s new president first learned of the pet-welcoming policy, she was understandably surprised. “I’d honestly never heard of that,” said Fern-Kirkland. “In my time in the industry I’ve worked with a lot of institutional companies, all of which had breed and weight restrictions. So, learning this was a pleasant surprise.”

In fact, 72% of renters say pet-friendly housing is hard to find, even while 76% of operators call themselves pet friendly. It’s a disconnect that isn’t surprising to PMG leadership and helps to set them apart from other operators.

“I have two pets and love them dearly,” said Fern-Kirkland. “They are such an amazing part of our lives and our family; I can only imagine the kinds of tough decisions I would have to make if housing restrictions impacted my pets. I’m grateful we don’t put our residents through that.”

#### Going to Bat for No Restrictions

PMG is the sole managing agent for Tides Equities, and therefore the touchstone between Tides and their rental housing residents. Early in her tenure with the organization, the subject of pet policies came up in a meeting between Fern-Kirkland and the managing director of Tides. As timing would have it, ownership had been contemplating instituting some of the typical weight and breed restrictions on their properties.

“The beautiful thing about this conversation is that it becomes a wonderful opportunity to advocate for keeping the restriction-free policies in place,” explained Fern-Kirkland. “When considering the affordable housing crisis, there are so many people who don’t have a choice but to rent right now. Housing is such a basic need; we all know that. Having shelter is critically important for individual and family stability. Our existing policy helped remove one of the barriers for our renters. We presented our argument, and our owners not only listened – they trusted and supported us.”

#### “No Restrictions” Doesn’t Equate to “No Rules”

For PMG leadership, a big part of the resident relationship is about lease compliance. Resident expectations are fully outlined utilizing the National Apartment Association Blue Moon lease. This includes a detailed pet policy addendum such as where pets are allowed on property, required vaccinations, leash guidelines and other property rules. It also reserves the right to remove from the community an animal displaying aggressive behavior.

“At the end of the day, when I look at how we manage from an organizational perspective, it’s about lease compliance,” said Fern-Kirkland.

Whether you're a person, a guest, or an animal, for us it is simply about behavior. If you can follow the rules, you're fine."

PMG leadership believes responsibility goes both ways, and lease compliance is the best tool to establish both their responsibilities as a landlord and the renter's responsibility as a resident.

## Pet Inclusivity as a Marketing Advantage and a Core Value

Like many companies, PMG has a well-articulated set of core values that helps inform decisions and actions throughout the organization. Those core values dovetail nicely with PMG's pet policies, and the marketing function provides the ideal opportunity to amplify both.

According to Lissi Daniels, VP of Marketing and Learning, the benefits to residents and the company are significant. "I love being able to market this value-add component for our company," said Daniels. "Pets are family. I look at my mom's situation as an example. She has a Labrador retriever and lives in an apartment. If she had to surrender her dog due to size restrictions, that would have such a profound negative impact on her well-being. Having the ability to take this concern away from our residents and brand our pet-friendliness is so meaningful. It's obviously great for our residents, and it's an incredible marketing tool.

Most importantly, it speaks to who we are as a company and hits on our 'heart' core value: having compassion for the self and others and respecting unique perspectives to harness collective strengths."

Stephanie Oehler, VP of People Success, is quick to add that, "From my perspective as Vice President of People Success, allowing all sizes and breeds of dogs in our multifamily properties not only increases our potential resident pool, but also creates a sense of inclusivity and community, which ultimately enhances our property management team's ability to provide a positive living experience for all residents.

## A More Inclusive Perspective on ESA Accommodation Requests

Aligned with PMG's perspective on removing barriers for their residents is their approach to ESA accommodation requests. Recognizing that restrictive pet policies often drive these requests as a method of circumventing a size or breed restriction is one of the many reasons all dogs are welcome.

According to Fern-Kirkland, "Any time an animal is deemed a reasonable accommodation, we have little ability to enforce our on-site rules.

If that same animal is considered a pet, I'm now empowered to enforce the rules; that's especially significant if that pet has displayed or has a history of aggressive behavior that would disqualify them from living on a property."

The company doesn't receive many accommodation requests and they don't present the time-consuming issue seen on properties with restrictive policies. Fern-Kirkland is quite familiar with how ESA requests create major frustration for both renters and front-line employees. In a former role, a steady stream of animal accommodation requests came across Fern-Kirkland's desk for approval. "Ultimately, we stopped trying to validate these requests and simply approved them. Who are we as an industry to tell people what they do and do not need? We are not in a position to judge someone; that's why we establish policies to guide and enforce behavior, not our opinions. The bottom line – why would I run someone through the ringer on this? I have bigger battles to fight."

## Defying the Insurance Objection

PMG doesn't buy into the insurer's typical recommendations on restricting breed either. A recent annual review spurred questions about pet policies and the usual restrictions, along with data on the cost of dog bites across the country. "My first reaction was, wait a minute – I know of many situations where a non-restricted dog has bitten," said Fern-Kirkland. "And with any dog, there are so many reasons a bite might occur. None of these have anything to do with breed. Again, it's about behavior and about not creating a restrictive environment where a pet suddenly becomes an ESA, removing my ability to enforce behavior rules."

## Looking to the Future

The best way to sum up PMG's case study is through Fern-Kirkland's words. "We move quickly because if you always do what you've always done, you always get what you've always gotten. There are paradigms that exist in multifamily that this leadership team has been hand-selected to change. We want to create shifts and reduce barriers and take care of the way people live. Our pet policies are part of that, and we are just getting started. I'm proud that when the option came up to institute restrictions, and we made the argument against doing that, our ownership group was forward-thinking enough to walk down this innovation path with us. And that's so important because we wouldn't be able to make this progress without their buy-in. We feel very grateful to have that type of autonomy and trust to continue to break industry stigmas."