

Pets and Housing Talking Points for Policymakers

Concerns about landlord agency

Landlords can always maintain agency of pet policies in their rental communities, without resorting to breed and size restrictions, through:

- A pet profile, like the Pet Personality Profile, as an assessment of an individual dog based on behavior rather than breed.
- A pet agreement, like this Sample Pet Agreement, as an addendum to the lease agreement. Through such an agreement, residents with pets must adhere to any written policies, with an expectation of consequences for violations.
- A renters insurance requirement to alleviate concerns around potential pet-related damage. A number of insurance companies offer policies with no breed restrictions, making renters insurance more accessible to people with pets.

Concerns about pet-friendly rentals reacting to legislation by not allowing pets

- There is no evidence of the inventory of rental units allowing pets declining in areas where more inclusive policies have been adopted. For example, the threat or fear that pet-inclusive legislation would greatly reduce the number of pet-friendly rental units ultimately did not bear out in Colorado after a pet rent and deposit cap was enacted in January 2024.
- Zillow recently reported that 44% of renters said they had passed on a particular property because it prohibited pets. 32% of renters said the same about a property with restrictions on pet breed and/or size.
- With two-thirds of U.S. households owning a pet, making rental units more pet-inclusive is a financially sound business decision.
- Residents in pet-friendly housing stay 21% longer than those in non-pet-friendly housing, and vacancies that allow pets are filled more quickly; this translates directly to higher net operating income for housing providers while simultaneously benefiting families with pets.

Importance of pairing breed and weight/size legislation

When considering the removal of breed restrictions from housing, we recommended not neglecting the issue of weight/size restrictions. By not addressing both breed and weight/size restrictions simultaneously in the legislation, a loophole is created whereby housing providers can circumvent breed restriction bans by simply enacting a weight/size limit - which could ultimately create the same

effect of preventing many dogs from being allowed in housing. If a housing provider were to take advantage of this loophole, they could conceivably enact a weight limit as low as a few pounds, which would give them the appearance of being pet-friendly when, in fact, they are preventing many pets from being allowed in housing.

However, if the addition of a weight/size limit will prevent the breed component from passing, it is recommended that breed be considered alone initially and that the weight/size limit be introduced at a later time. Baby steps are better than standing still.

The disconnect between pet-friendly and pet-inclusive

- There is a clear disconnect between renters and housing providers regarding the term 'pet-friendly.'
- 72% of residents say that pet-friendly housing is hard to find, and 59% say it is too expensive.
- 76% of rental property owners/operators say their properties are pet-friendly.
- This demonstrates that being 'pet-friendly' while only permitting certain pets is not enough.

Concerns about pet-related damage

- Owner/operators point to young adults (48%) and families with young children (37%) as the most costly source of damages, rather than dogs (31%), underscoring the lack of data to support the practice of singling out renters with pets for higher fees.
- Housing providers can require a pet agreement, like this Sample Pet Agreement, as an addendum to the lease agreement. Through such an agreement, residents and their pets must adhere to any written policies, with an expectation of consequences for violations.
- Housing providers can require renters insurance to alleviate concerns around potential pet-related damage. A number of insurance companies offer policies with no breed restrictions, making renters insurance more accessible to people with pets.

Impact of breed restrictions in housing

- Research and shelter data show that housing-related issues are one of the most cited reasons why pets are surrendered by their owners to animal shelters.
- A 2024 study assessing housing-related pet relinquishments from 21 animal shelters in the U.S. found that more than 28,400 pets had been relinquished in just a 4-year time period and that housing-related relinquishment made up approximately 14% of owner surrenders (ranging across shelters from 7% to 33% of owner surrenders).

- Faced with these restrictive policies, pet owners struggle to find suitable housing, and our shelters are chronically overcapacity. Breed restrictions play into disproven and harmful stereotypes that cause blanket fears based on outlying incidents and falsely portray larger dogs as inherently more aggressive and destructive than small dogs.
 - Recent research has shown that there is no correlation between pet dog genetics and threatening or biting behavior. Furthermore, identification of a dog's "breed" mix through appearance is often inaccurate, with a 75% mistake rate.
 - Restrictive or nonexistent pet policies can have devastating implications for residents and hinder the ability to secure safe, affordable, and inclusive housing.
 - Two notable studies have found that pet restrictions are more prevalent in predominantly Black neighborhoods and that nonrefundable up-front pet fees and monthly pet rents disparately impact BIPOC renters and low-income renters. Additional research explores the dynamic of dogs sometimes standing in for racial groups through social and historical lenses.
-

Pets and temporary housing

- The National Coalition for the Homeless estimates that up to 10% of Americans experiencing homelessness have a dog and/or cat.
- Most people will forgo a shelter if their companion is not allowed – even in inclement sub-degree weather and extreme heat. Evidence shows that people experiencing homelessness are more likely to accept temporary or interim housing if the housing is low-barrier and can accommodate pets.
- Significant resources exist that provide guidance on best practices for creating pet-inclusive shelters, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Shelter Operations: Pet-Friendly Shelters, RedRover's Don't Forget the Pets Training Handbook, the National Alliance to End Homelessness and Petsmart Charities' Keeping People and Pets Together, and Sheltering Animals and Families Together (SAF-T) Start-Up Manual.

Sources

- Applebaum, J., Loney, L. Horecka, K., & Graham, T.M. (2024) Companion animals relinquished to shelters due to housing issues in the United States from 2019-2023. *Front. in Vet. Sci.* doi: 10.3389/fvets.2024.1430388.
- Applebaum, J. W., Horecka, K., Loney, L., & Graham, T. M. (2021). Pet-Friendly for Whom? An Analysis of Pet Fees in Texas Rental Housing. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 8, 767149. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2021.767149>.
- Brissey, G. (n.d.). Zillow Rentals Consumer Housing Trends Report 2025. Zillow.com. Retrieved November 12, 2024, from <https://www.zillow.com/multifamily-knowledge-center/renter-insights/2025-consumer-housing-trends-report/>.
- H.B. 1068, 2023 Reg. Sess. (Col. 2023). <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb23-1068>.
- Kisley, M.I, et al. Investigating the Reasons behind Companion Animal Relinquishment: A Systematic Content Analysis of Shelter Records for Cats and Dogs, 2018–2023. *Animals* (2024) 14:2606. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14172606>.
- Linder, A. (2018) The Black Man’s Dog: The Social Context of Breed Specific Legislation, 25 *Animal L. Rev.* (2018).
- Michelson Found Animals. Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative. Pet-Inclusive Housing Report. (2021). Available at: www.petsandhousing.org/2021-pet-inclusive-housing-report/.
- Morrill, K. et al. (2022) Ancestry-inclusive dog genomics challenges popular breed stereotypes. *Science*. 376(6592). Doi: 10.1126/science.abk0639.
- National Alliance to End Homelessness, PetSmart Charities, & Koppel, R. (n.d.). Improving outcomes in homelessness: keeping people and pets together. Available at: <https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Keeping-People-and-Pets-Together-031220.pdf>.
- Rose, D., McMillian, C., & Carter, O. (2020) Pet-Friendly rental housing: racial and spatial inequalities. *Space and Culture*, 26 (1), 116–129. doi: 10.1177/1206331220956539.
- Saucier, P. K. (2018). Traces of the Slave Patrol: Notes on Breed-Specific Legislation. *Drexel Law Review*, 10, 21.
- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Key Considerations for Implementing Emergency Shelter Within an Effective Crisis Response System (2017). Available at: https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/emergency-shelter-key-considerations.pdf.

Last updated: 5/21/2025