



Removing Housing Barriers to Pet-Inclusive Housing

Sponsored by Representative Ismail Smith-Wade-EI

Pets are an integral part of Pennsylvania households, with 97% of owners viewing pets as family members. Yet, the barriers to maintaining pets in housing are many. For renters with pets, the rising cost of housing leaves limited and often unaffordable options in the market. Finding housing that accepts pets will often force families with pets to consider rents beyond their means, but they also find that additional fees or deposits are a condition of bringing their pet with them. This leaves renters with the untenable decision of absorbing unaffordable housing costs or relinquishing a beloved companion animal. These outcomes highlight the urgent need for policies that expand access to affordable, pet-inclusive rental housing.

The Cost of Pet-Friendly Housing

In Pennsylvania, of the housing that allows pets, 43% of the rental units impose nonrefundable fees and monthly “pet rent” on top of other charges such as third-party screening fees, refundable deposits, and one-time fees. These costs are rarely tied to any direct expense incurred by a property owner and can add up \$1,000 per year or more, making pet-friendly housing harder to access and pushing tenants deeper into financial strain.

Impact on Low-Income Renters

The burden is particularly severe for lower-income and marginalized renters. According to the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania’s August 2025 report, the state has more than 1.6 million renter households, with one-third facing rent-cost burden and over 425,000 classified as extremely low-income and severely cost-burdened. For these households, even modest fees can mean sacrificing other necessities to remain housed.

Impact on Survivors of Domestic Violence

For individuals experiencing violence in their home, these barriers can be a matter of life and death. In many cases, perpetrators of domestic violence tightly control a victim’s finances, giving them few options to leave without becoming homeless. Furthermore, concern over the safety of pets often delays domestic violence victims from seeking help, causes them to return to their abuser, or prevents them from seeking assistance entirely. Studies show that more than a quarter of domestic violence victims stay in abusive relationships for a median time of two years to avoid leaving their pets behind. And, a staggering percentage of domestic violence victims report returning to an abusive partner out of concern for their pets’ safety. With the lack of pet-inclusive housing options and the financial barrier of a pet-related rental costs, victims too often choose to stay in their unsafe housing situation.

Solution: This legislation makes housing more affordable and accessible for families with pets while maintaining appropriate protections for property owners. The bill:

- Prohibits landlords from charging “pet rent” or nonrefundable pet fees for common household animals.
- Allows a refundable pet deposit only, capped at 1% of monthly rent and no more than \$500 over the lease.
- Pet deposit may be amortized with monthly rent.
- Applies the deposit per unit and subjects it to existing security deposit rules.
- Allows survivors of violence to claim pet-related housing costs and emergency boarding through the Crime Victims Compensation Fund.
- Preserves all public health, animal welfare, and disability accommodation laws.