

**Charm City Companions \* Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter  
\* Humane Society of the United States \* Maryland SPCA \*  
Maryland Votes for Animals**

Testimony in Support of Bill 21-0004

Office to End Homelessness - Establishment, Administration, and Permanent Housing Voucher Program

Economic and Community Development Committee

February 23, 2021

The groups listed above support Bill 21-0004 and urge a favorable vote by this committee. The bill would create a permanent Office to End Homelessness, as well as establishing a housing voucher program to help transition individuals into independent, affordable housing. These reforms would create better pathways to stability for individuals facing homelessness, which in turn would provide stability for the companion pets and assistance animals those individuals own.

The animal welfare field supports legislation that elevates housing stability for all individuals. Lack of stable housing is a leading reason why families are forced to surrender or rehome beloved pets, resulting in broken families and homeless animals. Baltimore City government and non-profit organizations spend millions of dollars caring for homeless animals and providing pet wellness support to impoverished families. Data on pet ownership by individuals facing homelessness is difficult to attain, but it is estimated that between 5 and 10% of people experiencing homelessness own a dog or cat.<sup>1</sup> Difficulties in finding pet-friendly housing, breed specific limitations, expensive pet deposits, and other barriers can escalate the problems faced by individuals seeking to transition out of homelessness, creating insurmountable hurdles in a situation that is already overwhelming. We hope that the Office to End Homelessness, once created, can work with our animal shelters and residents to identify solutions to these barriers, and we believe that the flexibility created by the voucher program would help pet owners find pet-friendly accommodations as they transition into independent housing.

This legislation is needed now more than ever. When we look at the toll the pandemic has had on pet owners, we see an exponential increase in the demand for assistance with food, medical services, and other acute needs. Across the City our animal service organizations have been working to keep pets with their families during this difficult time. As moratoriums on evictions are lifted, the loss of a safe home threatens to be the tipping point for thousands of pet owners who will find themselves with no other choice than to surrender or rehome pets. This in turn will increase the numbers of animals entering Baltimore's animal shelters, which has its own cost on the City budget.

The best solution, for pets and their owners, is to keep these families together. Pets provide their owners companionship, protection, and emotional support. The last few months have proven the value that pets add to our lives in times of stress and chaos. No one should face the heartbreaking choice of remaining homeless or abandoning their pet. We urge this Committee to vote favorable on Bill 21-0004, which will provide important supports to individuals experiencing homelessness and their companion pets and assistance animals.

---

<sup>1</sup> "FAQs." *Pets of the Homeless*, Feeding Pets of the Homeless DBA Pets of the Homeless, 2019, [www.petsofthehomeless.org/about-us/faqs/](http://www.petsofthehomeless.org/about-us/faqs/).