

A white dog, possibly a French Bulldog, is sitting in a field of green bushes. The dog has its mouth open, showing its tongue, and is wearing a red collar with a silver ring. The background is a soft-focus green field.

Pets Are Welcome™

A guide to fair and equitable
pet-inclusive housing policies



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

INTRODUCTION	3
LEARNING THE FACTS.....	5
Terms to know and use.....	6
The national picture	7
Your local perspective.....	7
What is the impact on people and pets?.....	9
MAKING THE CHANGE	11
Change the conversation.....	11
Celebrate PAW properties	12
Speak their language	12
Show them that pets are profitable.....	14
Apply leverage	16
APPENDIX	17
Sample letter to the editor	17
Talking points.....	18
Building on your success	19
Additional resources	19

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Introduction

RENTAL HOUSING THAT WELCOMES ALL CATS AND DOGS

as pets, regardless of breed or size, is scarce in communities across the United States. Even properties advertised as “pet friendly” usually exclude popular dog breeds and set strict limits on a pet’s weight and size. They may also require cats to be declawed, limit renters to a single pet or impose hefty fees. According to an industry survey, [nearly three-fourths of Americans who rent have pets](#), so it’s no surprise that difficulty finding and keeping rental housing is a top reason dogs and cats are surrendered to shelters and rescues each year.

Jackie, a single mother with two young children and a 5-year-old German shepherd, Bo (her “third child,” as she described him), was forced to move when her rent was increased. She could not find housing that she could afford that would also allow a big dog. Faced with entering a homeless shelter with her two young children, she had no choice but to surrender Bo to an animal shelter.

Ms. Darlene in Baton Rouge became unemployed due to the COVID-19 crisis. This led her to be evicted from her home, where she resided with her grandson, two dogs, five cats, two ducks, two chickens and a parakeet. She stayed with a family member while looking for a new place to live but couldn’t have all of her pets with her at once. The pets stayed at various places, and she would go every day to feed, water and care for them, hoping they would all be reunited eventually. She frantically searched for a new place to live but when she found one, the pet deposit was more than the funds she had available. The HSUS’s Pets for Life program, operated locally by Companion Animal Alliance Baton Rouge, had supported Ms. Darlene while she was without a place to live, providing food, supplies and veterinary care for all the pets. The program paid for the pet deposit to bring this family back together, but families should not need to experience such heartbreak to stay with their pets.

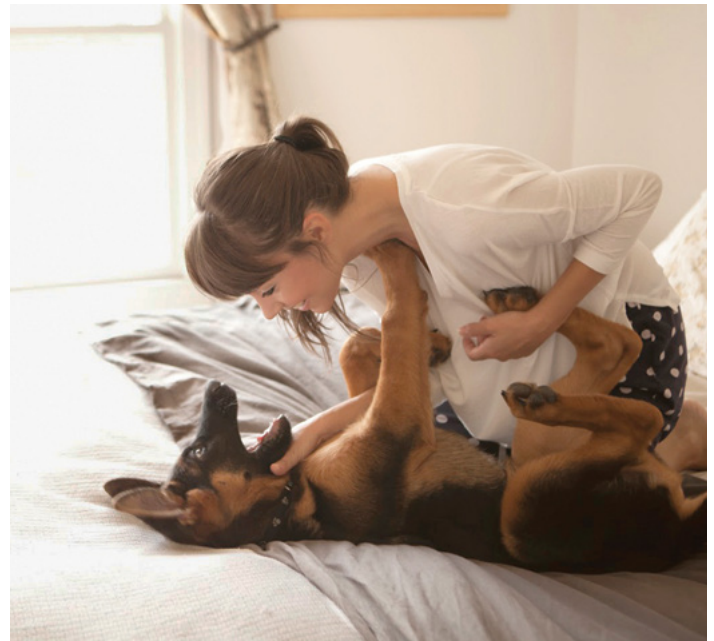
We believe people should never have to choose between their home and their pet.

Heartbreaking stories like this are unfortunately very common. Every day, people with pets struggle to find housing that accepts their whole family. The lack of accessible housing often has disastrous consequences, both for people and pets. Some people choose homelessness rather than separation from their four-legged family. But others are forced to relinquish their pets to shelters, ripping those families apart. Being forced to choose between a beloved pet and a

safe home has detrimental impacts on people’s physical health and emotional well-being, not to mention that it contributes directly to higher intake rates of healthy, adoptable dogs and cats in shelters each year. What’s the good news? It doesn’t have to be this way!

We can eliminate housing barriers for people with pets by transforming rental properties from so-called “pet-friendly” policies (which are anything but friendly to pets or their families) to truly “Pets Are Welcome” policies that ensure rental properties welcome all cats and dogs, regardless of breed or size. By working with the rental housing industry to demonstrate that PAW policies are not only safe but financially desirable, we will be able to keep as many as half a million more pets in their homes each year, safe with the families who love them.

Whether you are affiliated with a local shelter or rescue or are a pet owner passionate about making positive change in your community, you can join us in the effort to change the rental housing industry and convert every rental property to PAW.



Together, we can keep families intact and stop the flow of pets being surrendered to our nation’s shelters due to housing-related issues. This guide will show you how!



Learning the facts

What's the definition of a Pets Are Welcome property?

A PAW property welcomes cats and dogs, regardless of breed or size, and does not have other arbitrary restrictions like requiring cats to be declawed or limiting the number of pets a family can love.

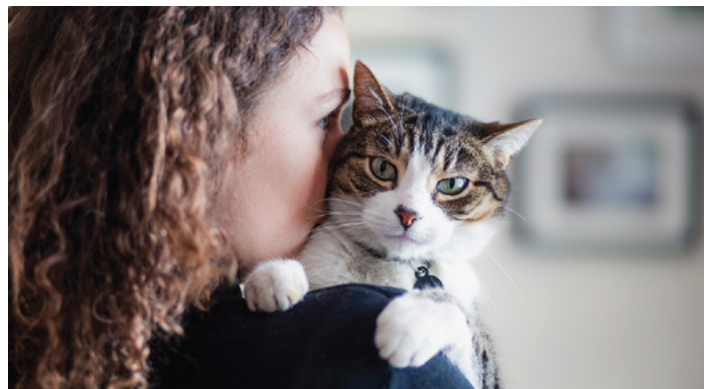
Why do we need PAW?

A lack of housing that welcomes all pets is one of the top reasons that pets become unnecessarily homeless. By transforming rental properties from “pet-friendly,” which typically contains arbitrary provisions like restricted breed lists and size limits, to “Pets Are Welcome” properties that welcome all cats and dogs, we can eliminate housing barriers for people with pets. With [36% of U.S. households renting](#), and [72% of renters owning pets](#), families shouldn't have to choose between their pet and a place to live, and local sheltering organizations shouldn't bear the burden of unreasonable and unfounded pet policies. By converting every rental property to PAW, we can stop the flow of pets being surrendered due to housing-related issues and the trauma of separation experienced by people and their pets.

What about the other restrictions we frequently see, like excessive fees, limits on numbers of permitted pets and cat declaw mandates?

At the HSUS, we believe that no family should have to choose between their pet and their home. Unfortunately, there are a variety of arbitrary restrictions in the rental housing industry. The most common being:

- Breed restrictions: While breed restrictions lean heavily toward pit bull-type dogs or other large breeds, you may be surprised to see a long list of other dog breeds prohibited in “pet-friendly” rentals.
- Weight limits: Often as low as 20 pounds, they restrict the large majority of dogs under the false belief that larger dogs may cause more damage and are noisier.
- Pet limits: Limits of two pets are common, but restrictions may allow for only one pet or may prohibit cats.
- Cat declaw requirements: Landlords may require any resident cat to be declawed under the misguided notion that a cat without claws will cause less damage to their property. Not only is declawing a cruel procedure where a cat's toes are amputated, chronic paw pain in declawed cats can lead them to avoid the litter box, thus causing more damage to the property than a cat with claws.



- **Pet fees:** Pet deposits make moving challenging, and expensive fees are out of reach for many families. These deposits affect all pet owners and are typically nonrefundable. Many pet-friendly apartments charge additional monthly rent per pet, often without providing amenities in return.

You may meet property owners with other types of pet-related policies, and/or those who are willing to relax a few—but not all—restrictions. However, a Pets Are Welcome property has no pet restrictions in place.

What are the barriers for people with pets in public housing?

Low- and extremely low-income households often must overcome barriers including resource inequality and limited accessibility to basic services. A pet service desert—a community where affordable services for pets are extremely limited or unavailable—is one example of such a barrier. Families with pets in underserved communities face numerous challenges in accessing information, veterinary care and quality food. The institutions that create and perpetuate these inequalities are systemic and must be addressed at all levels of government. Nationally, advocates can help by supporting increases in federal funding for rental assistance programs, and locally by supporting state policies to supplement those vital programs. With a national shortage of affordable rental housing, PAW options are scarce for households without financial flexibility. To keep pets in their homes, we must keep people in their homes and remain vigilant in responding to the disaster of poverty and the housing crisis.

Why aren't properties already on board with PAW policies?

The decision to allow pets, and what types of pets, is often a complex process with many players: property owners, who may or may not take the recommendations of their property management companies; individual landlords/managers who seek to operate a smoothly running community; insurance companies that explicitly prohibit particular breeds of dogs based on outdated and unsubstantiated information; and renters themselves, who play a key role in forming a manager's opinion of pets. Many of the people you'll speak with probably already love animals, and they'll likely want to share pictures and stories about their personal pets. However, it's also likely they've accepted the industry definition of "pet-friendly" and believe that their restrictive policies are necessary for a safe, profitable property.

At its core, the breed restriction issue has been a circular blame game between property owners and home insurance providers. The fallacy that some dog breeds are inherently aggressive began impacting homeowners and renters decades ago, when home insurance



providers started excluding from their coverage a static list of breeds believed to be a higher liability than others. The myth that some dogs are innately dangerous, coupled with selective media reports of bite incidents by certain perceived breeds over others, aided in propelling breed restrictions in rental units and statehouses across the country.

Today we know that using perceived breed or any single-factor approach to improve community safety is ineffective and discriminatory. Furthermore, research has shown that while singling out a particular type of dog may give the illusion of protection, it is costly and detracts resources away from fair, breed-neutral policies that aim to protect the people.

Despite numerous academic journals and recommendations by experts, some insurance providers include breed restrictions in their underwriting, thereby locking property owners and management into inflexible leasing situations unless they are willing to transition to an insurance company with breed-neutral policies. These barriers make finding housing for renters with pets difficult, and nearly impossible for those with financial constraints.

TERMS TO KNOW AND USE

Extremely low-income

Households with incomes at or below the poverty guideline or 30% of area median income, whichever is higher.

Landlord

Generic term for someone who owns or rents property; not a term typically used by industry insiders.

Low-income

Households with incomes between 51% and 80% of area median income.

Management company

Third-party company hired to manage day-to-day operations of a rental property. Sometimes these companies enforce pet policies dictated by the owner; sometimes they recommend the pet policy. In either case, they usually have influence over policies on the properties they manage.

Multifamily

Housing with a minimum of five units that is not occupied by the owner; most apartment complexes are multifamily housing.

Owner

The property owner(s), who may or may not manage the actual complex(es). Owners can be individuals, companies or investor groups.

Pets Are Welcome (PAW)

An HSUS term used to describe properties and pet policies that welcome cats and dogs regardless of breed or size and do not have other arbitrary restrictions like requiring declawed cats or limiting the number of pets a family can love. Equivalent to “pet-inclusive.”

Pet-friendly

Outdated term that means pets are allowed at a property but are subject to restrictions including, but not limited to, size or weight limitations, breed restrictions, cat declaw requirements and/or limits on the number of pets a household may have. Our goal is to convert properties to PAW, where these arbitrary restrictions are eliminated.

Pet-inclusive

Current term that means pets are allowed at a property without limitations. Equivalent to the HSUS’s term “Pets Are Welcome.”

Property manager

A professional managing one or multiple properties. At small complexes they may be hired by the owner; at large corporate properties they are an employee of the management company.

Public housing

Housing that has been provided with federal assistance for the purpose of planning, developing and managing affordable housing for low-income families, families transitioning out of homelessness, veterans, people with disabilities and the elderly. This can be provided either through offering physical housing spaces or vouchers for discounted rents in housing otherwise available to the general public (often referred to as “Section 8” housing).

Residents

The term the housing industry uses to refer to its tenants, though “tenant” is the legal term used on paperwork and tenant law documents.

THE NATIONAL PICTURE

- **Two-thirds of American households have pets.** Half (63.4 million) own dogs, and just over one-third (42.7 million) own cats. ([2019-2020 APPA National Pet Owners Survey](#))
- **19 million pets** are living with their people at or below the poverty level. ([HSUS Pets for Life](#))
- **On average, cats and dogs are living in multiple-pet households.** Cat owners in the lowest income brackets are most likely to own three or more cats—making pet deposits and monthly pet fees even more onerous. (*2019-2020 APPA National Pet Owners Survey*, p. 198)
- **6.5 million cats and dogs** enter shelters and rescues each year (3.2 million cats, 3.3 million dogs). ([ASPCA pet statistics](#))
- **For renters, the most commonly cited reason for pet surrender** is an inability to find affordable pet-inclusive housing. ([ASPCA press release](#))
- **Approximately 1.5 million cats and dogs** are euthanized in shelters each year. ([ASPCA pet statistics](#))
- **72% of renters** have pets. ([apartments.com](#))
- **34% of millennials** own a dog; 30% own a cat. (*2019-2020 APPA National Pet Owners Survey*, p. 4)
- **66% of all dogs** owned in the U.S. are 25 pounds or more, and about half of them are mixed breeds. (*2019-2020 APPA National Pet Owners Survey*, p. 81, 84)
- **The average length** of tenancy of renters with pets is more than twice that of renters without pets. ([Firepaw Study](#))
- **Pet owners** do statistically no more damage to rental units than people who don’t own pets. ([Firepaw Study](#))

YOUR LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Anecdotally, you already know that there’s a shortage of PAW rental housing where you live. Pets are undoubtedly being surrendered to your local shelter due to housing challenges, and you likely have heard stories from friends and neighbors about their struggles



finding rental housing that accepts pets.

You're likely aware that there is a nationwide affordable housing shortage. Year after year, the supply of rental housing available to low-income renters has consistently diminished while the need has only increased. In fact, there is no state in our country with sufficient affordable housing for the lowest-income renters. As resources continue to remain static or decline for families in need of assistance, it's important to engage locally and work with your elected officials to ensure there are sufficient safety nets for those facing housing insecurity.

While national research and statistics do a great job of painting the big picture and stressing the need for reform on a broad scale, it's vital for you to be able to talk about the issues from a local perspective. Being able to tell reporters, advocates, municipal officials and others precisely what's happening in your town—and putting faces, names and stories to those numbers—is much more impactful than simply relying solely on national estimates. Keeping track of local data and statistics will also help you measure the success of your advocacy over time.

Get started by finding answers to the following questions about the neighborhood, city, county or state you're looking to influence:

- What types of housing are available, and what is predominant (e.g., is your community mostly apartment buildings, single-family homes, mobile homes, public housing, etc.)?
- What percentage of housing is owner-occupied, and what percentage is renter-occupied?
- What is the supply of available subsidized housing for your community? Try contacting your local housing advocacy group for this information.
- What resources are available for low-income renters with pets (e.g., pet deposit assistance, temporary fostering/housing for pets during moves, etc.)?
- What percentage of rental homes are PAW? How many allow pets with breed and weight restrictions? How many restrict all pets?

The following websites can provide answers to many of these questions. Other sources (such as local tax offices, apartment associations, tenant groups and community development organizations) can fill in gaps.

- [City-data.com](https://city-data.com) provides statistical data about cities nationwide.
- Apartment data can be found at weareapartments.org/data.
- Comprehensive housing information can be found at census.gov/programs-surveys/ahs.

- Apartment search sites like rent.com, hotpads.com, apartments.com and craigslist.org can help you find complexes and residential communities.
- The National Low Income Housing Coalition collects data on [each state's housing needs](#).
- Individual pet policies are usually included within rental property ads or on company websites.
- [Eviction Lab](#) is a database tracking evictions and housing policy in communities across the country.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON PEOPLE AND PETS?

Local sheltering and rescue groups are a good source for collecting and sharing the devastating consequences of restrictive pet policies. Consider connecting with your local shelter or rescue to help determine the number and types of pets and families who are most impacted by arbitrary housing restrictions. If you've experienced this issue firsthand, combining your personal narrative with your community's broader statistics can be a powerful tool for change.

If you are not already affiliated with your local sheltering or rescue groups, ask to meet with managers or retention program coordinators to acquire this data. These individuals may be well acquainted with your community's top housing providers and may have knowledge about local rental policies and restrictions that affect adoptions. By explaining to them why you are taking on this project, sharing this guide and other resources, and welcoming them to join in the effort, you will likely have their full support.

Use the [Shelter Pet Project's search tool](#) to locate animal shelters and rescues in your community.

If you work for or with an animal shelter or rescue group, access the free [Keeping Families Together Eviction Response Toolkit](#) from Human Animal Support Services by American Pets Alive!



Making the change

The idea that pet-friendly housing isn't very friendly to most pets isn't new to most of us who care about animals. Who hasn't experienced the struggle of finding housing that will allow pets, either firsthand or through a friend or relative? But what's our most common reaction? "That's just the way it is; if you have pets, good luck finding a rental that will take them."

On the property owners' and managers' side, the status quo is even more ingrained. Seemingly all of their industry journals, associations and even sample leases and other documents stress the same message: Pet-friendly is the way to be. But pet-friendly by definition includes breed restrictions (the breeds restricted may vary, but existence of a breed list is usually a given); size or weight restrictions (typically 25-35 pounds maximum); and policies limiting the number of pets a family can have.

Converting the rental housing industry to PAW means changing how the general public as a whole views restrictive pet policies. And it means working with property owners and managers to demonstrate it's not only in their financial interest to change, but that failure to change is not an option. How do we achieve this?

THE FOUR-STEP APPROACH TO SUCCESS:

1. Change the conversation.
2. Celebrate PAW properties.
3. Speak their language.
4. Apply leverage when necessary.

We have outlined the basics of each step, but these are certainly not the only options to achieve success. Be creative!

CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

There's a very good chance your community has little, if any, knowledge of the devastation the lack of PAW housing is causing, particularly regarding the scarcity of affordable PAW rentals. Families are separated, and local shelters and rescues spend countless resources rehoming loved family pets and working to help pet owners find

and keep PAW properties, but no one is demanding that property owners change their policies. Raise awareness in your community to show that the current status quo not only should change, but it can be changed!

When engaging with your local lawmakers, be sure to address the availability of affordable rental housing in your region. Advocate for rental assistance programs, the national Housing Trust Fund and sufficient long-term financing for affordable housing. These are investments in your community. In times of crisis, assistance from these types of programs may be all a family needs to overcome a financial emergency and avoid surrendering a pet. Prioritizing the housing crisis in your community will help keep people and pets in their homes. Organizations like the [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#) and [Eviction Lab](#) are excellent resources to help you learn about this important issue. Additionally, reaching out to your local affordable housing nonprofit can give you a better picture of ways to engage in your community.

Be sure to use the information you collected about the local rental housing landscape as well as local shelter intake data and anecdotes to tell the story about the real, tangible effects of misguided housing restrictions. Share your passion! But most important, be sure to let people know that the situation isn't hopeless. Rental policies that are hurting pets can be changed, as long as local property owners begin to hear the public outcry.

Consider all avenues available to tell the story:

USE TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Submit letters to the editor and opinion pieces to local, regional, state and even national papers (see Appendix for samples); write blog posts, either on your own website or those of friends/colleagues/others sympathetic to the cause (e.g., "[Tired of taking in pets that already have loving owners?](#)"); ask local journalists to consider writing investigative pieces about the issue; and/or raise the issue at civic meetings, government meetings and other forums.



HARNESS THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Use your network of social media contacts to encourage anyone who has had trouble finding or keeping rental housing with pets to share their stories on public forums; start a polite dialogue on rental properties' Facebook pages about pet policies; and/or encourage people to share their feedback on pet policies through business review sites like [yelp.com](https://www.yelp.com).

CAPITALIZE ON NEWS STORIES

Whenever a news story about pets and families separated by bad housing policies comes up, use it as an opportunity to generate buzz and revisit the issue in all of your traditional and social media outlets.

There are untold numbers of ways you can help change the conversation about rental housing in your community. Think outside the box to identify the methods that will be most effective in your community.

CELEBRATE PAW PROPERTIES

One of the best ways to show that PAW policies are feasible and profitable is to highlight and celebrate properties that already have those policies in place. Even if you have to start with just one local property owner who welcomes all cats and dogs, regardless of breed or size, publicly thank them and hold them up as an inspiration to others.

Look for ways to celebrate PAW properties by name in social media, the local paper and other outlets. The more you can do to spotlight PAW properties in your community and even drive potential renters to them, the harder it will be for the rest of the property owners in your community to claim PAW policies can't work.

Remember, you can be particularly enthusiastic about celebrating those properties that have converted to PAW policies thanks to your efforts! Use each success as a launchpad for more advocacy.

SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE

In our experience, housing people are animal people too! They love their pets as much as we do and will welcome the opportunity to share their own funny pet stories and photos. Part of the problem lies in the fact that they may not see the impact their policies are having on other people who love their pets just as much. The industry has given them the false certainty that traditional pet-friendly (a.k.a. restrictive) policies are the best.

It's also necessary to understand what motivates and moves property managers and owners. Even though they love their pets, they may have priorities that they believe are counter to being a PAW property. Their primary motivation, typically, is ensuring that their properties are safe, profitable and that they operate as smoothly and efficiently as possible. The bottom line? They need to make money and decrease turnover of tenants. Your advantage? PAW policies will actually help them be more profitable than ever!

Increasing awareness of the issue and celebrating PAW properties will only get you partway to your goal. At some point you are going to have to begin connecting directly with properties to ask them to join the growing network of PAW properties. Here are some tips to make that initial outreach easier:

- Identify potential properties to target. Check with family, friends, colleagues, social media contacts, etc. to find out if they own

rental property or if they can put you in touch with people who do. They may also lead you to realtors, real estate attorneys, local politicians, etc. who may be willing to provide you with additional contacts and introduce you to property owners who might be open to changing their policies. As you begin to exhaust your personal connections, use online classifieds and search tools such as [craigslist.org](https://www.craigslist.org), [apartments.com](https://www.apartments.com), [rent.com](https://www.rent.com) and others to identify additional contacts.

- Decide which contacts are most likely to be the “low-hanging fruit.” Properties with owners/managers already involved in pet causes, for example, or those to whom you have a direct personal connection will be easiest to approach. You may also be more successful starting off with properties that are already pet-friendly (i.e., open to allowing pets but with breed or weight restrictions), as opposed to properties where no pets are allowed at all. Choose one or two and make contact!
- Try to connect with the property owner/manager by phone or email to ask for a meeting. Email is great for providing information, and follow-up phone calls add a personal touch, but don't rely on only one method of communication as preferences will vary. Be sure to arrive to all meetings on time (or better yet, early), wearing attire appropriate for a business meeting. Express your gratitude that they took time out of their busy day to meet with you, and stay professional and gracious no matter what takes place during the meeting.
- If your meeting turns out to be with a lower-level official with no decision-making authority, try to engage him/her as your ally as you take PAW up the chain of command.
- Always end any meeting or call with a commitment to next steps—the next action each of you will take to keep the conversation going.

Don't forget that all change takes time—just because we know that switching to PAW policies is the right thing to do doesn't mean everyone is going to jump on board. Pardon the cliché, but this is a marathon, not a sprint: The keys are to be persistent and persuasive, and to not get discouraged!

AN IMPORTANT NOTE

Depending on where you live, there may be a number of large-scale apartment communities that are part of a conglomerate and are not owned and operated by a single individual. At these properties, the local manager typically doesn't have the authority to make changes to the existing pet policy; that authority lies with an executive at the corporate headquarters, maybe in another state. But that doesn't mean that you should avoid speaking with them and expressing your

concerns about their pet policies—after all, the best way for the corporate executives to feel pressure to change will be by hearing local property managers report that people are raising concerns.

Similarly, try reaching out to your state or local apartment associations to speak with representatives from the industry. These groups can have big influence over what policies become the norm. In some regions, the dominant apartment association will create the template lease agreements and policies that major apartment complexes use in the state.

Don't be discouraged if you don't hear back, but do consider options that have a better chance of quick victory, like keeping your most intensive focus on smaller properties where you have a better chance of speaking directly with the decision-maker.

Don't forget that all change takes time—just because we know that switching to PAW policies is the right thing to do doesn't mean everyone is going to jump on board. Pardon the cliché, but this is a marathon, not a sprint—the key is to be persistent and persuasive and not get discouraged!



FOR SHELTER AND RESCUE PROFESSIONALS

Find industry contacts by tapping into your expansive network of volunteers, boards of directors, staff and even your organization's subscribers, followers and members.

SHOW THEM THAT PAW POLICIES ARE PROFITABLE

There is a lot of data to support the fact that restrictive pet policies don't make financial sense for rental properties—owners and managers just don't know it! Use the facts below to help build your case.

- Pet owners, statistically, [do no more damage to rental units than people who don't own pets](#). So fears about additional expenses associated with renting to people with pets are largely unfounded.
- The average length of [tenancy of renters with pets is more than twice that of renters without pets](#). Therefore, not only do pet-owning residents NOT cost properties more money, they actually can save the considerable costs associated with unit turnover.
- Pet ownership continues to rise: 67% of households in the U.S. currently contain animals ([2019-2020 APPA National Pet Owners Survey](#)), and [72% of renters have pets](#). That means the pool of renters who own pets is going to continue to increase, and properties that arbitrarily restrict pet ownership will be missing out on the majority of highly qualified renters.
- Dog ownership continues to rise among younger generations ([2019-2020 APPA National Pet Owners Survey](#), p. 80). Therefore, properties that are not open to dog owners will be missing out on the most attractive group of potential renters.
- 66% of all dogs owned in the U.S. weigh 25 lbs. or more, and about half of them are mixed breeds ([2019-2020 APPA National Pet Owners Survey](#), p. 81, 84). Typical breed/size restrictions, therefore, exclude half the dog-owning population from consideration as potential tenants.

The facts prove it: Properties with PAW policies can pick from the largest pool of highly qualified prospective tenants, and they actually save money because their tenants stay more than twice as long in their units with no increase in damage or other costs.

TALKING POINTS

Most justifications for breed/size restrictions, limits on number of pets permitted, mandated declawing, etc. are based on myths or misunderstandings. These talking points can help you overcome most typical objections.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A "DANGEROUS" OR "AGGRESSIVE" BREED OF DOG

Most property owners and managers are surprised to learn that there is no scientific basis supporting the notion that any breed of dog is more "dangerous" or "aggressive" than another. In fact, independent experts like the Centers for Disease Control, American Veterinary Medical Association and others agree that policies that restrict dogs based on appearance do nothing to reduce dog bites



FOR SHELTER AND RESCUE PROFESSIONALS

Animal shelters across the country are implementing programs to better serve their communities and keep pets and their families together. Compile a list of resources your organization can offer residents to help overcome restrictive policies.

Ideas can include:

- Establishing a program to pay one-time pet fees/deposits
- Offering in-person and teletraining to help with behavioral challenges, and provide no-cost pet behavioral assessments to help ease landlord concerns
- Providing short- and long-term fostering for pets of families in temporary or transitional housing
- Advocating for more affordable housing and housing assistance
- Providing pet supplies such as:
 - Crates
 - Collars
 - Leashes
 - Litter boxes

Remember that property staff and managers are isolated from the results of their restrictive policies: They never see families torn apart or pets entering the shelter as a result of their actions.

Help them make the connection by sharing a poignant story of a relinquished pet, or invite them to the shelter for a tour to meet all the amazing animals waiting to be adopted. (This also boosts your credibility!)

in communities or enhance public safety. And the fact that half of dogs are mixed breeds, rather than purebreds, would make it nearly impossible to enforce breed restrictions even if they had validity.

A better practice is for every dog to be treated as an individual and evaluated independently.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS AN "APARTMENT-SIZED" DOG

Many rental properties embrace small dogs and impose weight or size limits (e.g., no dogs over 25 pounds). But there is no perfect "apartment dog"; some small dogs may be vocal and excitable, reacting to sounds they hear throughout the day, while many larger dogs may be content to lie silently on the couch all day awaiting their owner's return. Just as no dog should be excluded based solely on misperceptions regarding his breed, no dog should be excluded from a rental property just because he happens to weigh more than an arbitrary size limit.

TENANTS WITHOUT PETS TYPICALLY WELCOME THEM

Property owners, of course, want to ensure a safe, comfortable environment for all residents, whether or not they have pets. But pet restrictions are not necessary to make other residents feel safe. A [2014 apartments.com survey](#) found that most residents enjoy living in a building that welcomes pets; in fact, 75% of non-pet-owners surveyed said that they either enjoy, or at least are not bothered by, the idea of living in a building with pets.

PETS DON'T CAUSE MORE DAMAGE

Owners are understandably concerned about damage to their properties, both inside rental units and in common spaces. But a study examining the impacts of pets on rental housing ([Companion Animal Renters and Pet-Friendly Housing in the U.S.](#)) found that renters with pets statistically do no more damage than those who don't own pets.

PAW PROPERTIES ARE STILL INSURABLE

If property owners aren't aware of insurance companies without restricted breed lists, let them know there are quite a few insurance companies, including major carriers like State Farm and Farmers, that have

done away with restricted breed lists because they have no validity.

PET-RELATED AMENITIES AREN'T ENOUGH

Many properties are already aware that pet-owning renters are desirable and believe the best way to entice prospective residents is by offering amenities like dog parks, pet washing facilities and even concierge walking services. But unless their policies welcome all cats and dogs, the property is still only accessible by a portion of the pet-owning population. To attract the most highly qualified residents, properties are much better served by simply changing to PAW policies, rather than investing in expensive amenities.

For a full list of talking points, see the Appendix.



APPLY LEVERAGE

By changing the conversation, celebrating PAW properties and speaking the industry’s language, you have ideally established the foundation for every property in your community to embrace PAW policies. But what about the holdouts? Don’t close lines of communication, don’t be discouraged and don’t give up—but do turn up the heat! Here are some ideas to consider:

- Just as you publicly celebrate companies with PAW policies, explore options for naming properties that refuse to consider change, in such outlets as traditional media, social media, business review websites and other forums.
- Engage current residents of those properties to attempt to effect change from within.
- Meet with municipal officials, alert them to the expense associated with caring for the animals surrendered to the local municipal

shelter each year due to arbitrary housing restrictions, and ask them to consider options for recouping those expenses from the rental housing community.

- Meet with local politicians who are sympathetic to the cause to see whether they might consider taking action to address housing restrictions. For example, in Los Angeles the city council passed a resolution requiring landlords and animal advocates to consider options to make more rental housing available to pet owners (see [“Los Angeles Wants to Make a Lot More Apartments Take Pets”](#)); you might also consider asking your state legislators to explore options for a statewide ban on rental housing practices that discriminate against dogs based solely on their breed or size.
- Reach out to your [HSUS state director](#) or ask a local animal law attorney to evaluate whether your state has a ban on requiring declawing for renting or breed-specific policies, and if so, whether any legal recourse exists against properties violating existing law.



Appendix

SAMPLE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SAMPLE A

Finding affordable, pet-inclusive housing should not be an insurmountable challenge in our community. Families shouldn't have to choose between retaining their home or keeping their beloved pet. Still, due to pervasive industry policies with inflexible restrictions, families throughout [TOWN/CITY] often face that impossible choice.

Arbitrary restrictions limiting the size and/or number of pets a family may love can be callous and unfair. And so are practices like imposing unreasonable pet fees, pet deposits or pet rent. Breed restrictions are entirely baseless and prejudicial. Numerous studies have proven that breed is not indicative of a dog's personality and that breed-specific legislation does not create a safer community. Restrictions such as these, imposed by housing providers, are ill-advised and ineffective in creating a humane community for their tenants—and they disproportionately affect families with limited choices about where they live and how much they can spend on rent.

Inclusive pet policies, on the other hand, are beneficial to housing providers for a variety of reasons. Nearly 85 million U.S. households, and an estimated 72 percent of renters, have a pet. This means landlords without pet restrictions have a greater pool of qualified tenants to choose from and will gain longer-term, more stable residents—which in turn means lower turnover costs. Additionally, studies prove that pet-owning tenants stay in their rental properties twice as long as those without pets and cause no more damage than non-pet-owners.

The facts are clear:

Breed and size restrictions don't keep people or properties safer. Just as there is no such thing as a "dangerous" breed of dog, there is no perfect "apartment-sized" dog. And without exception, all families in our community deserve a home that welcomes their pet.

SAMPLE B

Declaw requirements for cats in rental properties are misguided and cruel.

Declawing is no trip to the spa. It involves amputating the last part of a cat's 10 front toes. A comparison in humans would be cutting off a person's finger at the last joint. So it may be a surprise to learn that some landlords require tenants to have their cat declawed as a condition of their lease.

Scratching is normal cat behavior that allows cats to condition their claws, mark territory and stretch their muscles. Declawing isn't necessary to prevent damage from scratching. Keeping the cat's nails trimmed and providing appropriate scratching posts are easy solutions that don't harm the cat. The reality is that one in five cats have long-term complications from declaw surgery; half have immediate postsurgical complications; and one-third of declawed cats have behavioral problems after declawing.

Landlords in California and Rhode Island are specifically prohibited from requiring cats to be declawed, while New York state bans declawing outright, as does much of Europe, Canada and other countries around the world.

Let's make pets welcome in our community by getting rid of this unnecessary, arbitrary and cruel requirement.

SAMPLE C

To protect pets, protect renters.

Housing insecurity has plagued our country for decades—it can be difficult for anyone to find a suitable home for their family, but for low-income renters those challenges come ten-fold. Here in [INSERT STATE/COMMUNITY], we have only [XX affordable housing opportunities for every 100 extremely low-income families]. As an animal welfare advocate, I understand that housing insecurity is one of the primary reasons for pet surrender across the country.

Renters with pets are often already limited by arbitrary restrictions, and a family without much financial flexibility will have even fewer choices about where they live. Compound pet ownership with low-income housing opportunities, and it isn't hard to see how so many families with such limited options are forced to choose between a home and keeping their beloved pet.

Year after year, our local animal shelters see pets surrendered as people are needlessly evicted from their homes. Animal and human welfare cannot be viewed independently, and if we want to protect pets, we must also protect the people who care for them. Vulnerable renters need assistance now, not to be dragged through eviction hearings, be forced to surrender their pet and be left with a broken home or without a home. [Insert action item: City Council should support any opportunities to provide rental assistance moving forward/City Council should prevent evictions in their jurisdiction ...] or [support federal legislation].

SAMPLE D

We've served [CITY/TOWN] for many years, and due to the variety of services we offer our community, our work can be an emotional roller coaster—we're joyous when reuniting a lost pet, somber when we have to break hard news, thrilled when a family adopts a new companion animal and compassionate when a family has to make the tough choice to relinquish a pet.

We're grateful to be a resource for our community, but it's tough to see families—who would give anything to keep themselves whole—

have to surrender a pet because of their housing circumstances. Many families cite trouble finding housing that will accept pets as the reason for relinquishing their pets to our shelter.

Additionally, pet-inclusive housing can be out of reach for many families. Often, “pet-friendly” housing includes numerous barriers such as excessive pet fees and rent, restrictions on breed and size, limitations on how many pets and/or declaw requirements. These barriers keep pets and families apart, and it is our duty as residents of [XXX] and guardians of the voiceless to speak up and advocate for truly pet-inclusive housing—without arbitrary restrictions about who we bring into our families and love.

Our community deserves housing that welcomes all pets. No family should ever have to choose between their pet and their home.

TALKING POINTS

A PAW POLICY IS SAFE

There is no evidence that supports the notion of a “dangerous” or “aggressive” breed of dog. Even independent entities like the CDC and AVMA agree on that. There is also no evidence that any breeds of dogs pose greater liability than others. Restricted breed lists, therefore, are completely arbitrary. Check out our [Repealing breed-specific legislation toolkit](#), where we've included links and studies to help support your assertion that no breed or type of dog is more dangerous than any others. Simply imposing basic rules, like a leash policy,



that apply to all dog owners will go further toward increasing safety for residents, staff and service people than arbitrary breed lists.

A PAW POLICY IS PROFITABLE

Managers and companies are under great pressure to generate profits for the property or their investors. On-site staffers need to meet budgets, prevent apartment damages and maintain an attractive property. Be sympathetic to these needs and demonstrate how PAW boosts the bottom line. In addition to statistics listed in this toolkit, share results from the [Companion Animal Renters and Pet-Friendly Housing in the U.S.](#) study to discuss financial benefits.

A PAW POLICY IS IN DEMAND

In 2012, only 59% of rental properties identified themselves as accepting pets—just two years later, that number had jumped to 78%. This reflects the growing rate of pet ownership among renters, particularly millennials, and the notion that accepting pets gives properties a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Soon, however, just accepting certain types of pets, or providing fancy amenities designed to entice pet owners, won't be enough—renters will demand properties that accept all of the dogs and cats they choose to share their lives with, regardless of breed or size (half of all dog owners own medium- to large-sized dogs). Properties that embrace PAW policies, welcoming all cats and dogs without restrictions, will have a competitive advantage over those that don't.

REQUEST OR OFFER A PET RÉSUMÉ

Some large dogs are quiet couch potatoes, while some small dogs are high-energy and vocal. This makes rental policies that set size restrictions arbitrary and counterproductive. If a prospective tenant has a dog, try scheduling a meet-and-greet. In cases where it isn't feasible to meet a pet in person, renters can offer a pet résumé highlighting their pet's personality and any personal references, such as past landlords or veterinarians. It's smarter for property managers to make a decision about each pet individually, without preconceptions, instead of making biased assumptions about a tenant and their pet. [Research shows](#) that pet-owning residents do not cause more damage or other financial concerns than residents who don't own pets.

FEDERAL PROTECTIONS FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH A DISABILITY

Congress has provided broad protections to disabled persons so that they may have the opportunity to enjoy and participate in mainstream American life. Assistance animals (including emotional support animals) are animals who provide a benefit to assist a disabled person but

do not need to be trained or certified to perform a specific task, and may be any type of species. The Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act ensure that all animals who function as [emotional support animals](#) may reside in rental housing, regardless of any restrictions in the property's current pet policies.

BUILDING ON YOUR SUCCESS

Every accomplishment, big or small, is huge when you take into consideration the number of families impacted by restrictive housing policies! Even something as simple as having a landlord say yes to a tenant with just one pet they otherwise wouldn't have considered is progress you should celebrate and use to build momentum.

Be sure to keep detailed records on strategies and owner support programs getting the most attention, gaining the most traction and having the most impact. Repeat what works well for you or your team, and take time to review and reset strategies that don't seem to be working as well.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Pet-inclusive housing initiatives:

- [Michelson Found Animals](#)
- [Human Animal Bond Research Institute](#)
- [FIREPAW Pets and Rental Housing resources](#)



Our Promise

We fight the big fights to end suffering for all animals.

Together with millions of supporters, we take on puppy mills, factory farms, trophy hunts, animal testing and other cruel industries. With our affiliates, we rescue and care for thousands of animals every year through our animal rescue team's work and other hands-on animal care services.

We fight all forms of animal cruelty to achieve the vision behind our name: a humane society.
And we can't do it without you.



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