



**Proponent Testimony on House Bill 277
House Ways and Means Committee**

Lori Carlson, Executive Director, Licking County Humane Society
October 31, 2023

Chairman Roemer, Vice Chairman Lorenz, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, my name is Lori Carlson, and I am grateful for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 277, The Pet Friendly Rental Act. I am the Executive Director for the Licking County Humane Society. We are a private, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization organized under Ohio Revised Code 1717. As such, we are authorized to appoint humane agents who enforce Ohio's animal protection laws. I am also on the Board of Directors for the Ohio Animal Welfare Federation.

The Licking County Humane Society has been serving animals and people in Licking County for 57 years. After working for 26 years in child welfare, I joined the humane society with a tireless passion to increase the social services offered by our shelter. We now provide low-cost spay/neuter services, low-cost wellness clinics, pet food for the pet-owning Meals on Wheels clients in our community and so much more. Our goal is to be "More Than A Shelter" by providing programs that help keep people and their animals together.

We recently began a new program called the Bright Spot Clinic. This program provides wellness services to our unhoused, pet-owning population in Licking County. In a partnership with our local Salvation Army, unsheltered individuals with pets can come to the monthly clinic to receive critical vaccines for their animals such as rabies. They are also provided pet food, leashes/collars, and preventatives such as flea/tick medication. What we have learned is that many homeless people want veterinary care for their pets but are unable to afford it. In many cases, their pet is the ONLY thing they have in their lives, and they take better care of their pets than themselves. The unconditional love and companionship of the pet gives comfort to individuals who literally have nothing else. It's easy to say that unhoused people shouldn't have pets, but the reality is that the emotional benefits of having a pet are shown to decrease levels of cortisol (a stress-related hormone) and lower blood pressure. Other studies have found that animals can reduce loneliness, increase feelings of social support, and boost your mood.

In consultation with the organizations in our community who are serving the displaced population, we discovered that clients will refuse housing because they are not permitted to bring their pet. They will also refuse warming centers in frigid cold weather if their pet cannot be with them. We have had cases of people getting severe frost bite because they gave their coat to their pet. This is what we do for beloved family members. To address this issue, Licking



LICKING COUNTY
HUMANE
SOCIETY

County non-profits and churches came together to welcome people and their pets into warming centers. Our humane society provides kennels, food, and other supplies to assist with the care of the animals.

HB 277 will not only help the unsheltered population, but it will also help the middle class, seniors on fixed incomes, and low- income families. Families and individuals reach out to us every week because they are losing their housing or need to move for other reasons. They cannot find pet-friendly housing and must surrender their beloved family member to the shelter.

As you all know, Intel is coming to Licking County. There are so many wonderful benefits of this growth for our county and our country. But housing and rental costs have sky-rocked in anticipation of Intel. This, combined with inflation, has created a situation where more people, including seniors, are finding themselves homeless, or living in their cars. Many choose to live in their car with their pets rather than surrender their furry family member to a shelter. These are often people who work! But it is a challenge to find pet-friendly housing. Things like pet deposits and increased monthly pet-related rent complicate it even further.

House Bill 277 encourages landlords to offer pet friendly rentals by providing them with a \$750 per unit tax credit up to a cap of \$7,500 if they permit dogs and cats to reside in their units, do not restrict dogs by breed or size, and do not impose nonrefundable, one-time pet fees or additional monthly pet rent. They may, however, prohibit dogs that have been determined to be dangerous or vicious under Chapter 955 of the Revised Code. This is not a mandate for landlords, merely an opt-in which we believe will lessen the burden on pet owners and help them obtain housing. It will decrease the overpopulation in shelters, it will prevent the suffering of a devastating loss, decrease homelessness, and provide seniors with more housing options.

I believe HB 277 is a win-win for all concerned. For those of you who are pet owners, ask yourself this...if you lost everything tomorrow - your job, your home, your resources – what option would you choose? 1) surrender your pet to a shelter to comply with the apartment complex's rules, 2) keep your pet and face a houseless existence, or 3) have affordable, pet-friendly housing options. I believe we would all choose number three. HB 277th is the only option that keeps pets and people together.

In closing, I'd like to take a moment to thank Representative Brent and Representative Ray for their leadership on this bill. On behalf of the Licking County Humane Society, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this legislation. I appreciate your careful consideration of this important issue and am happy to answer any questions you may have.