

Testimony in Support of HB 277-Pet-Friendly Rental Act from Found House IHN, Cincinnati

As President & CEO of Found House Interfaith Housing Network in Cincinnati, Ohio I meet families—parents and children—that have lost their housing. This loss results in profound crisis. There is the immediate emergency of needing a place to go, basic shelter, and the long-term challenge of finding new housing, rental property, that is habitable and affordable. There is also the trauma, especially for children, of disruption to routines and to school, loss of belongings, and the persistent uncertainty and anxiety of not having a place to call home. It is our job at Found House IHN to both provide emergency shelter and to assist in finding new housing that meets the needs of families, as well as their budgets.

In the midst of this enormous crisis and trauma, I have encountered people that consider where the dog, cat, or hamster that is a part of the family will go to be a minor detail—an unnecessary challenge in the middle of much larger concerns. The response from these same people is that obviously the cat, dog, or hamster will have to be surrendered to a shelter. Sometimes they go even further and declare people that have trouble affording their housing should certainly not be having pets in the first place.

It is precisely because of the crisis and trauma that parents and children experiencing housing loss and insecurity are already experiencing that it is the wrong time to also require they endure the loss of a beloved pet that provides comfort, a sense of support, unconditional love, and is considered to be a member of the family. That is why Found House IHN began providing services in 2014 to support pet care and pets staying with their families through housing loss.

Finding that new housing, however, is a challenge. Rental markets have exploded and Cincinnati has been identified as a market where rent has risen the fastest. Development has been focused on higher end properties. Families—working families and the majority of families that come through the Found House IHN emergency shelter ARE WORKING—are being priced out of rentals. It is hard enough to find rental housing at all, but even harder to identify housing where families can maintain their pets. Are working families not entitled to keep the pets they love and enjoy the benefits of pet ownership? Are such benefits only for higher end renters with higher incomes? Are we to tell children that have suffered housing loss that their cats, dogs, and hamsters are less important than those of children whose parents can pay more for housing?

Providing incentives for landlords to be pet-friendly is an excellent way to decrease the challenge of accessing affordable housing and an even better way to show working families that how they structure their families—with or without furry members—matters as much as anyone else's family.

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