



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

Sharon Harvey, President and CEO, Cleveland Animal Protective League
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Chairman Roemer, Vice Chairman Lorenz, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, my name is Sharon Harvey and I thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 277, The Pet Friendly Rental Act. I am the President & CEO of the Cleveland Animal Protective League (APL), which is the humane society for Cuyahoga County and one of the largest animal shelters in Ohio. 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'm also the President of the Board of the Ohio Animal Welfare Federation.

The Cleveland APL has served the animals and people in our community for 110 years. Most people know us for our animal cruelty investigations work, adoption and spay/neuter programs, and as an animal shelter. But today, we are more than a shelter; we are an animal resource center for the animals and pet families in our community.

As a recognized innovator and leader in animal welfare in the U.S., the Cleveland APL is reaching beyond the walls of our shelter and trying address root causes of pet homelessness and the surrender of pets to shelters, one being human homelessness and housing insecurity. Ten years ago, we introduced project CARE, which stands for Community Animal Retention Effort. Through this program we provide guidance and resources to income-qualified pet owners in the city of Cleveland. Ultimately, our goal is to keep these families together by supporting pet owners and keeping their pets out of shelters. HB 277 directly impacts that work.

The Cleveland APL's mission is to foster compassion and end animal suffering. There is no question that animals suffer when they lose their people and people suffer when they are left with no option other than giving up their beloved pet ... their family member.

Families with pets who cannot afford the customary higher monthly rents and nonrefundable pet deposits required by many pet-friendly rental properties often face insurmountable barriers to finding housing where their family can stay together. People living in poverty, senior citizens struggling on fixed incomes, people with every day financial challenges, and sometimes people who simply need to move often are forced to consider devastating choices, such as losing their home with nowhere to go, giving away their beloved, four-legged family member, or keeping their pet and living on the street or in their cars. People who are already suffering suffer more, their pets suffer, and the community suffers. Part of addressing the root cause involves offering pet families more options when they need to relocate, whatever the reason.

Already this year, nearly 110 pets have been surrendered to the Cleveland APL alone because their owners were facing challenges with landlords or had lost their homes and couldn't take their pets. Nearly 160 more were surrendered because their owners were "moving." Obviously, these numbers don't include pets who have been given away to others or simply abandoned. And this is happening across Ohio and our country.

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. We are also open to amended language that allows pet friendly landlords to limit the number of pets permitted to reside in each unit. It's critical to note that landlords who do not want to permit pets will not be compelled by this law to do so. This is not a mandate. They simply will not qualify for the tax credit and may continue to structure their leases as they see fit.

In closing, I'd like to take a moment to thank Representative Brent and Representative Ray for their belief in the importance of the human animal bond. By sponsoring this proactive piece of legislation, they are recognizing not only that pets are members of our families, but also the benefit that they bring to Ohioans and Ohio communities. Yes, HB 277 is about helping animals, but it's equally about helping people. People are struggling and need the companionship of their pets more than ever to get them through tough times.

On behalf of the Cleveland Animal Protective League, thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this legislation. I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of this important issue and am happy to answer any questions you may have.