



Proponent Testimony on House Bill 277
House Ways and Means Committee
Colleen Evans, Executive Director, Ohio Animal Welfare Federation
October 31, 2023

Chairman Roemer, Vice Chairman Lorenz, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, my name is Colleen Evans and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Animal Welfare Federation. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 277, The Pet Friendly Rental Act.

The Ohio Animal Welfare Federation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization representing more than 100 animal welfare organizations across the state. Our members are humane societies, dog wardens and animal control officers, and 501(c)(3) animal welfare organizations from 60 of Ohio's 88 counties that serve more than 90% of Ohio's population.

According to Shelter Animals Count (SAC), which is an independent non-profit organization created to collect and share shelter data and trends, animal shelters in Ohio, and across the country, are struggling with a population imbalance. Simply put, more animals are entering our shelters than are leaving. This imbalance puts added stress on shelters, rescues, and government-funded organizations that are already working at capacity, or beyond. In 2022, three quarters of shelters nationwide reported that they were working BEYOND their capacity for care, forcing them to make difficult decisions so that they could continue to help as many animals as possible.

There are many contributing factors leading to the population imbalance, and an increase in community intakes is one of them. SAC predicted that without significant intervention, animal intakes were expected to climb each month this year to a 3-year high, outpacing outcomes such as adoptions or transfers.

There are many reasons why people relinquish their pets to animal shelters, but among the most heartbreaking are those related to families that are forced to do so because of housing insecurity. These people, whether they are living in poverty, senior citizens living on fixed incomes, people struggling with every day financial challenges, or people that simply need to move, are often forced to consider giving up their four-legged family member or face living in their car or even on the street until they can find an affordable place for their entire family, four-legged members included, to live.

The bottom line is that people facing these difficult decisions need more options for housing. HB 277 encourages landlords, but importantly does not mandate them, 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 rent.

Incentivizing landlords not to penalize people with pets is what SAC means when they talk about the “significant intervention” that is needed to address the population imbalance in animal shelters and ultimately keep families together.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and statewide members of the Ohio Animal Welfare Federation, thank you for your consideration of HB 277 and for the opportunity to explain why we believe incentivizing landlords to offer pet friendly rentals will have a direct impact on the housing insecurity issue in our state. We would also like to extend our thanks to Representative Brent and Representative Ray for their sponsorship of the bill and recognition that it will not only help animals, but the people who consider them family.

I am happy to answer any questions.