

SB 496 / Supporting Vulnerable Populations and their Pets

Pet Assistance for Houseless and Domestic Violence Shelters and Providers

SUMMARY

SB 496 will improve access to homeless services for unhoused individuals and survivors of domestic violence with companion animals by reducing barriers to access to shelter and address the gaps in available resources, security, and accommodations for pets within qualified homeless and domestic violence shelters in Oregon.

BACKGROUND

Every year, too many pets enter animal shelters because of human-related issues. One of the most frequently cited reasons for relinquishing a pet is housing insecurity and with up to ten percent of Americans experiencing homelessness owning a pet the need for increased support is critical. High-barrier shelters often require people choose between shelter or their beloved pet—a companion who typically is their only source of stable love and support. As a result, many people will forego critical services and shelter to keep their family unit intact.

According to the Oregon Statewide Shelter Study (2019) the inability to shelter with a pet or service animal ranks among the top 10 barriers to shelter. There were also open-ended questions and being unable to shelter with a pet ranked number 4 for the write-in responses. Additional evidence shows that people experiencing homelessness are more likely to accept temporary or interim housing if the housing is low-barrier and policies that make accommodations for pets will benefit both people and their pets.

SOLUTION

SB 496 proposes the following:

- Amends the Emergency Housing Account grant program to include an additional six million dollars support and assist individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness to allow for an individuals' pets, including pet food, shelter, supplies, and basic veterinary services;
- The Oregon Housing Stability Council shall develop a pet assistance policy through rulemaking to allow for program funds to be used by emergency and domestic violence shelters to accommodate individuals' pets, ensuring individuals and their pets remain together; and
- Requires Housing and Community Services Department to report on use of funds to interim committee of Legislative Assembly on or before September 15, 2024.

SUPPORT

Clackamas Women's Shelter, Clackamas County • Companion Animal Medical Project, Deschutes County • Thrive Central Oregon, Deschutes County • The Shepherd's House Ministries, Deschutes County • FUSE Central Oregon, Deschutes County • Peace at Home, Douglas County • Homeless Oregon Pet Project, Josephine County • Northwest Coastal Housing, Lincoln County • Family Promise of Lincoln County • ARCHES Inn, Marion County • Center For Hope & Safety, Marion County • Blanchet House, Multnomah County • Bradley Angle, Multnomah County • Portland Animal Welfare Team, Multnomah • Do Good, Multnomah County • Oregon Humane Society, Multnomah County • Good Neighbor Center, Washington County • HomePlate, Washington County