



January 23, 2023

Senator Kayse Jama and Vice Chair Dick Anderson
Senate Committee on Housing and Development
900 Court St. NE
Salem Oregon 97301

Dear Chairman Jama, Vice Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and our Oregon supporters, we are submitting our written testimony in support of SB 496, expanding resources to some of Oregon's most vulnerable populations and helping to keep families together.

As a leading expert on policies and programs that serve both pets and the people caring for them, regardless of their socio-economic status, HSUS works at the state and national levels for inclusive solutions to co-sheltering and removing barriers to affordable housing.

Housing related issues are reported to be one of the top reasons for pet relinquishment. Despite various diversion programs, many people are faced with the devastating decision to either surrender their pet or access essential resources our government provides to those in need of assistance. Ninety-five percent of Americans consider their pet to be family, we share a bond that's nearly unbreakable. While that statistic is not surprising, it transcends a person's ability to lock their front door at night. Pets not only offer companionship and security, but they also require responsibility and routine. Therefore, it is understandable many people experiencing homelessness or instability rely on that structure and are unwilling to part with their beloved pet—no matter the personal cost or perceived inconvenience.

We can better serve Oregon residents, by recognizing that were missing an important piece of the puzzle that this legislation can fill. SB 496 amends the Emergency Housing Account grant program to include an additional six million dollars support and assist individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness and for those seeking shelter as well as facilities that harbor survivors of domestic violence. The funding authorized will help provide safe shelter, food, supplies, and basic veterinary services effectively eliminating high barriers for individuals with pets. Additionally, qualified shelters will be able to use the funds to support increased staffing needs and insurance costs related to providing those services.

While a new concept for Oregon, over the last two years California has prioritized serving both ends of the leash by authorizing funding for a similar program. In its first year, shelters awarded funding saw huge success in their communities, serving 107 people and 113 pets. In my conversations with previous grant recipients, the overwhelming consensus was that this program has been hugely beneficial and has empowered them to boost support for those they serve. The funding allowed providers to offer services that typical grant/contract dollars don't always support, like providing pet food. It also enabled them to bring in professional support, such as grooming, training, and veterinary services (on-site/off-site). One shelter director praised the program, noting that providing this level of care and support has built immeasurable rapport with people who have been traumatized and repeatedly been burned by our systems. He stated that it's an opportunity to offer a level of care that many have not experienced, which has been priceless.

There's a significant gap in available resources for unhoused pet owners and its seen all over the state. SB 496 will help provide some security for those seeking assistance knowing they have a place to go where their pet will be welcome. In these unprecedented times, the importance of companionship has been seen increased attention. As have the obstacles that our most vulnerable communities must regularly overcome to maintain their physical and emotional wellbeing.

We want to thank the Senate Committee on Housing and Development for considering this legislation and we strongly urge the passage of SB 496, protecting both companion animals and their guardians. With its passage, we look forward to working with the Oregon Housing Stability Council and other stakeholders to develop a comprehensive policy so that shelters interested in offering these services feel confident in their ability to accommodate individuals' pets. Thank you again for your time and consideration of SB 496.

Sincerely,

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