

OREGON HUMANE SOCIETY

Date: January 25, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Housing and Development

Senator Kayse Jama, Chair

Senator Dick Anderson, Vice-Chair

Senator Tim Knopp

Senator Deb Patterson

Senator Janeen Sollman

From: Kelly Bremken, Veterinary Social Worker, Oregon Humane Society

RE: SB 496

Established in 1868, the Oregon Humane Society is Oregon's largest and oldest animal welfare organization with over 50,000 supporters statewide. We are not affiliated with any local or national organization. Today, we ask for your support of SB 496, a bill that would improve access to homeless services for unhoused individuals and survivors of domestic violence with companion animals, helping keep people and pets together.

As a social worker specializing in the human animal bond at the Oregon Humane Society, I see the beneficial impact of pets for people in crisis. My work with people experiencing homelessness and domestic violence includes both ends of the leash. It is my job to divert pet surrender by helping people access services that include their pets. Unfortunately, there is a significant gap in available resources for unhoused pet owners in our community.

The clients I work with are faced with the impossible decision to accept assistance for themselves by surrendering their pets. It is heartbreaking listening to people describe how lovely their pet, their beloved member of the family, could be for a new adopter.

Helping people wrestle with the decision to surrender a pet or forego temporary shelter or services such as showers and laundry because pets are not allowed often feels like helping them make the best worst decision.

Clients confide their worries and secrets in their pets. People experiencing homelessness often feel isolated and alone and pets offer companionship and distraction from the struggle of surviving. Pets give people identity, a client told me that when they are on the street with their dog, they aren't the woman who lives in their car, they are Princess' mom. For unsheltered members of our community, their world gets smaller and smaller as they lose more things in their life. A pet may be one of the only things they have left.

My work at the shelter gives me unique perspective on what happens to people and pets when we sever the human animal bond. People desperately miss their pets and I know pets miss their people too, anyone who has dropped off or picked up a dog at a boarding facility can relate to that.

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Wonderful pets are being surrendered by loving homes because pets are not welcome in many of our community's services.

I want to thank the Senate Committee on Housing and Development for considering this legislation and I strongly urge the passage of SB 496.

Please vote 'yes' on SB 496.

Sincerely,

Kelly Bremken, CSWA, MSSW, VSW
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