



# HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Dear Chair Longoria and Committee Members,

On behalf of American Pets Alive!, and the Human Animal Support Services project, please accept this letter in support of the following bills to improve tenants' rights and housing security in Texas. The HASS project is a national collaborative of municipal shelters and nonprofit rescues whose mission is to keep people and their pets together. HASS facilitates critical engagement of animal welfare organizations, communities, and human services organizations to build a system to better address the modern needs of communities, both for people and the pets they love.

## Protecting Eviction Information:

- **H.B. 511** (Rep. Wu), which would prohibit disclosure of eviction information when an eviction case is dismissed, a judge rules in favor of the tenant defendant, or the eviction case is filed following a foreclosure and the tenant is not at fault.
- **H.B. 1450** (Rep. Collier), which would prohibit disclosure of eviction information when an eviction case is dismissed, a judge rules in favor of the tenant defendant, or the eviction case is filed following a foreclosure and the tenant is not at fault.

## Opportunities to Cure Lease Violations:

- **H.B. 673** (Rep. Collier), which would require landlords to provide a 7-day period to cure lease violations prior to filing an eviction notice.
- **H.B. 3306** (Rep. Bryant), which provides a tenant a right to cure a lease violation for nonpayment of rent any time prior to a judgment against the tenant in eviction proceedings, unless the tenant has cured a failure to timely pay rent any other time in the previous 12 months.

## Prohibiting Discrimination on the Basis of Source of Income:

- **H.B. 1193** (Rep. Turner), which would prohibit a property owner's association from discriminating against a potential resident based on their method of payment.
- **H.B. 3277** (Rep. González), which would prohibit housing discrimination on the basis of a person's income.

## Providing Notice to Tenants:

- **H.B. 1820** (Rep. Meza), which would require landlords to provide tenants with a 24-hour notice prior to entry, unless there is an emergency.



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The systemic oppression of low-income and marginalized communities, and the consequential lack of resources in those communities, directly impacts pet owners' ability to care for and keep the pets they love. Nowhere is this more clear than how pets and their owners are impacted by the epidemic of housing injustice in our state, including a staggering lack of access to safe, affordable housing for low-income renters and some of the highest eviction rates in the country.<sup>1</sup> According to the Texas Affiliation of Affordable Housing Producers (TAAHP), almost half of all Texas renter households are housing-cost burdened, meaning they spend greater than 30% of their income on expenses directly related to housing (rent, utilities, insurance, etc.).<sup>2</sup> The National Low Income Housing Coalition reported that there are only 25 affordable and available rental homes for every 100 extremely low-income renter Texas households (which make up approximately 22%, or approximately 905,000, of all renter households) and 44 affordable and available homes for every 100 low-income renter households.<sup>3</sup> That shortage of rental units is likely more significant for low-income families who are looking for pet-inclusive housing.

Housing insecurity and the lack of access to affordable housing is one of the most important issues impacting peoples' ability to keep the pets they love. In shelters and rescues in Texas and across the country, housing is one of the most frequently cited reasons for owner surrender intake. An industry survey estimates that 72% of rental households have pets and, according to the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#), households have an average of 1.6 dogs and 1.4 cats per household. **With an estimated 2.28 million renter households living at or below 50% AMI<sup>4</sup> and, therefore, likely severely rent cost burdened and experiencing chronic housing insecurity, we can predict that approximately 1.64 million of these households will have at least one pet. More than 1 million pets in Texas are at a high risk of relinquishment to animal shelters and rescues in their communities because of the vast housing insecurity facing tenants in our state.**

From 2019 to 2022 (which included a period of robust tenant protections in response to the COVID-19 pandemic), 21 HASS pilot shelters across the country, including two Texas shelters, reported that housing issues forced families to relinquish almost 30,000 pets to their local animal shelter or rescue. For these shelters, housing-related intake contributed to between 7% to 33% of all owner surrenders. Although housing intake reasons vary, the most commonly noted reasons for relinquishment were owners unable to find pet friendly, affordable housing; evictions or conflicts with landlords; and costs related to keeping a pet in a rental home.

Because of the inescapable impact of evictions and landlord-tenant dynamics on people and their pets, HASS supports the bills identified above as important efforts to increase access

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.texastribune.org/2022/04/15/texas-evictions-pandemic-rent-relief/#:~:text=Austin%20ranked%20eighth%20among%20the,dollars%20has%20nearly%20run%20dry.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://taahp.org/texashousingfacts/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/texas>

<sup>4</sup> <https://nlihc.org/oor/state/tx>



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to affordable rental housing and improve housing security for tenants and the pets they love. H.B. 511, 1450, 1193, and 3257 improve low-income tenants access to decent, safe, and affordable housing that is currently often denied tenants with eviction information on their records (regardless of whether the judgment for or against the tenant defendant) and those relying on government assistance as a portion of their payment. Texas is one of only two states in the country that explicitly prevents efforts to end housing discrimination on the basis of a tenant's legal source of income<sup>5</sup>, meaning that Housing Choice Voucher holders are generally concentrated in low-opportunity neighborhoods with a high percentage of residents living in poverty. This effectively cuts the legs out from under the purpose of the Housing Choice Voucher program, which is to allow low-income tenants' access to rental housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods. H.B. 673 and 3306 increase housing security by ensuring that tenants have reasonable opportunity to cure lease violations, which is particularly important in today's economic climate when more tenants than ever are living paycheck-to-paycheck and may need a grace period to comply with lease terms and avoid eviction. Finally H.B. 1820 is a key animal welfare and tenants' rights issue. H.B. 1820 would give tenants autonomy over when somebody enters their home while also protecting pets, owners, and staff entering a unit by allowing pet owners to plan ahead and either remove their pet from their home or secure their pet in a safe place prior to maintenance or other staff entering their home.

Sadly, Texas ranks No. 1 in the country for the number of healthy animals euthanized at animal shelters each year. Even our most admirable rescue and rehoming efforts will likely fail to get our state out of that unenviable position. At HASS, we recognize that human and animal issues are intimately connected and challenges that humans face are often the root cause of why families give up pets that they love. No family should be forced to choose between a roof over their heads and their pet and we believe that advocating for tenants' rights is the path forward for Texas and our collective goal to protect the human-animal bond and end the euthanasia of healthy, adoptable pets in shelters. For these reasons, we respectfully request that this Committee vote in favor of these vital tenant protections. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

**Lauren Loney**

**American Pets Alive! | Human Animal Support Services**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.texastribune.org/2018/11/19/texas-affordable-housing-vouchers-assistance-blocked/>