

Pet Friendly Act: Ohio lawmakers consider tax credit for landlords who allow pets.

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Columbus Dispatch

State lawmakers want to make it easier for Ohioans with pets to find rental housing that accepts their animals.

State Rep. Sharon Ray, R-Wadsworth, and state Rep. Juanita Brent, D-Cleveland, both longtime dog owners, introduced House Bill 277, the Pet Friendly Rental Act.

The bill would authorize a tax credit for landlords that allow "companion animals," meaning dogs and cats.

Landlords would receive \$750 per pet-friendly unit and up to a maximum credit of \$7,500. To receive the credit, the landlord cannot restrict pets because of their breed or size, and they cannot impose nonrefundable fees or additional rent related to the pet. There is, however, a provision that restricts vicious or dangerous dogs.

All landlords would still have the choice to have pet-free units.

"I would be surprised if there was much opposition because ... this is a totally voluntary program," Ray said. "This is just for landlords that would like to participate."

Ray said the legislation is in response to the growing and complex housing crisis throughout the state.

"Several older folks, widowed or living by themselves, they're ready to downsize and move into a rental unit," Ray said. "They're struggling to keep up with their home maintenance, but they're not willing to decide that they have to part with their pet to do that."

She added that a report by the Ohio Department of Aging said 33% of Ohioans will be over the age of 60 by 2030.

For some renters, it's the additional fee landlords charge to own a pet that is a huge barrier, especially for those who cannot pay it, Brent said.

"We're going to have a time where you're going to have almost as many renters as you're going to have homeowners, and that's where the trend is going,"

Brent said. "Ohio has to be prepared for what's going to be the inevitable in the future, and that's more renters."

Some of the thought behind the bill came from seeing the importance of companionship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ray said a study by the Human Animal Bond Research Institute found 85% of respondents agree interaction with pets can reduce loneliness and 76% agree that human-pet interactions can help address social isolation.

"We're hopeful that the rest of my fellow members of the legislature will agree that this is a good idea, and it's a program that we should offer to landlords and for landlords that have been hesitant in the past to allow companion animals for fear of ... pet damages,... there is a credit to offset that," Ray said.

The bill is currently awaiting a House committee assignment.