

SB 496 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Action Date: 02/08/23

Action: Do pass with amendments. Refer to Ways and Means by prior reference. (Printed A-Eng).

Vote: 5-0-0-0

Yeas: 5 - Anderson, Jama, Knopp, Patterson, Sollman

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

Prepared By: Kevin Rancik, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 1/25, 2/8

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Allows funding from the Emergency Housing Account to be used towards certain pet-related services of individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Appropriates \$6 million in one-time, General Fund moneys to be used for grants to qualified emergency or domestic violence shelters with rules of conduct for pets and their owners, and that provide support for individuals' pets, including food, crates or kenneling, and basic veterinary services including behavioral services. Requires grant recipients to submit reports of activities, costs, and effectiveness to the Housing and Community Services Department. Requires the department to provide report to interim committee of the Legislative Assembly by December 31, 2024. Declares emergency, effective July 1, 2023.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Definition of "pet" and which pets would be eligible for assistance
- Accessibility of vaccinations and pet veterinary history; veterinary procedure recovery time
- Rationale for service provider policies (capacity; funding; safety; state policy)
- Experiences of other states
- Role of domestic violence in homelessness and pet ownership
- Program funding and accountability/reporting

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

Defines eligible companion animals as those specified in ORS 401.977. Removes specific requirements for vaccination, spaying, and neutering. Clarifies that report to interim committee is only required of organizations providing services to companion animals; modifies language that report includes "costs of each activity" to "costs expended." Changes date of report to interim committee from September 15, 2024 to December 31, 2024.

BACKGROUND:

Current statute directs the Housing and Community Services Department to administer the Emergency Housing Account (EHA), which assists low or very-low income persons who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Specific policies regarding the use of program funds are developed by the Oregon Housing Stability Council with the advice of organizations, housing and service providers, and government entities. Program grants may cover emergency shelters, transitional housing, in-home services, and emergency home-related payments.

The EHA does not currently cover pet-related expenses. Data are not widely tracked; the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) suggests roughly 10 percent of those experiencing homelessness own pets (NAEH, 2020), while other studies suggest the number reaches 25 percent (Rhoades et al, 2015). Few homeless services providers allow pets on the premises. Costs of pet ownership are currently the responsibility of the pet owner, with some nonprofit organizations providing assistance through donation funding and partnerships with animal welfare organizations.

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Senate Bill 496 A allows EHA grants to cover pet assistance, including food, crates or kenneling, and basic veterinary services, for individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness; allocates \$6 million in one-time funding for organizations providing these services; and requires reporting to the legislature of organizations' program-related activity no later than December 31, 2024.