



Dear Hon. Selina Robinson,
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

For the past two years, Pets OK BC has been advocating for an end to “no pets” policies in British Columbia’s housing market. Gathering over 18,000 signatures online and now over 10,000 signatures on paper, British Columbians have shown overwhelming support for our family-friendly legislative proposal that will keep families together with their pets. According to a study conducted by the BC SPCA, nearly 80% of British Columbians support tenants having the right to keep pets in their homes.

We write to you today to advocate for your support in changing the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA), Strata Property Act (SPA), and Manufactured Homes Park Act (MHA) to nullify the discriminatory and overreaching “no pets” policies. By doing so, we will help prevent needless suffering of the thousands of families across the province who are affected each year. The manner in which this issue was handled in 2004 by the BC Liberals’ government did not by any means solve the problem, and only reinforced the unsubstantiated notion that pets are a major cause for concern. We see this unfortunate consequence play out in the housing market, for example as currently affordable pet-friendly buildings are sold to new investor-owners that introduce “no pets” policies, diminishing an already scant supply.

Now with a real opportunity to correct past mistakes, our organization is specifically advocating for British Columbia to follow the *Ontario model*, which removed the pet restrictions clause from their Residential Tenancies Act in 1990, given that the Quiet Enjoyment provision is respected. Furthermore, no additional “pet damage” deposit was deemed necessary. The State of Victoria, Australia passed very similar legislation on October 8, 2017, giving renters the right to keep pets, and those denied by landlords have the right to appeal. We strongly urge the government of British Columbia to act in the best interests of families with pets, and repeal the current pet restrictions clauses, so that responsible tenants, which are the majority, are not punished for the mistakes of the few. Our tenancy acts already have the necessary protections built-in to protect landlords and tenants, without an additional pets clause. Families with pets deserve to be treated the same as everyone else.

In recent years, we have seen a direct correlation between the housing affordability crisis and the “no pets” issue. The number of companion animals surrendered to the BC SPCA due to housing issues has steadily risen, from 1300 in 2013, to 1500 in 2015, to over 1700 in 2016. Without affordable pet-friendly housing options, pet guardians are often forced to decide between giving up a beloved family member, going homeless or choosing inadequate housing. Those who are fortunate enough to find pet-friendly housing are often price-gouged, due to the extremely short supply.

Current tenancy legislation in B.C. allows landlords complete authority over tenants’ rights to keep pets, with no justification whatsoever. Our proposal is a middle-path solution that adheres to the Quiet Enjoyment provision. This ensures tenants and landlords are protected from issues, such as allergies, noise disturbances, aggression, and damages, and that they are dealt with on an individual basis, rather than blanket policies that cause undue hardship to perfectly responsible pet guardians. Considering the views of our opponents, namely landlords who are already facing financial challenges maintaining their properties, the greatest cause for concern is actually the difficulty of dealing with legitimate complaints. We unequivocally support addressing these concerns and improving the dispute resolution system. We applaud the BC NDP government for increasing funding for the Residential Tenancy Branch, following years of cuts, and view this as a step in the right direction. Our organization urges the provincial government to look into ways to streamline the process and improve results and accountability for all parties.

Pets OK BC advocates for all residents, but we uphold that those experiencing physical and psychological disabilities, homelessness, advanced age and other vulnerabilities are at a further disadvantage when it comes to securing housing as pet guardians. Furthermore, caring for a pet has been shown to extend the lives of seniors, and enhances women’s safety, with women staying up to seven times longer in abusive relationships, when they can’t find a place to go with their pets. For many, their animal companions provide meaning and fulfilment, and in many cases help alleviate distressing symptoms of their circumstances. Being denied the right to take their companion animal with them, amidst efforts to improve their housing and safety, can not only be devastating emotionally, but can be a major barrier to quality of life.

Pets OK BC advocates for the rights of tenants and homeowners to keep pets, and encourages the BC NDP government to take corrective legislative action to improve the situation faced by countless families across the province.

Thank you for your time and attention to this issue of significant public interest and concern.

Sincerely,

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The following organizations have signed on in support of the resolution of this letter:

Animal Protection Party of Canada