

HEAD: Pet rent in Colorado to get caps under new law headed to governor's desk

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HEAD: Landlords will have to cap pet rent for residents under new bill headed to Polis' desk

HEAD: Caps on pet rent for Colorado residents headed to Polis' desk

HEAD: Something more fun about pet rent?

File photo of a person and their dog or cat

By Matt Bloom

Colorado will soon cap the amount of money landlords can charge residents for pet rent. State Democrats gave final approval to a new bill this week, and now only need the governor's signature to make it law.

If signed, the bill would cap pet rent at 1.5 percent of the owner's monthly rent or \$35 a month – whichever is greater. Pet deposits will get capped at \$300 on top of other security deposits and must be fully refundable.

The measure also makes it against the law for homeowner's insurance companies to discriminate against specific dog breeds when selling policies. And law enforcement agencies carrying out eviction orders must return pets to their owners or to a local shelter.

"We've given options and predictability to pet lovers and pet guardians across the state," said Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis, a Democratic sponsor of the bill. "We've heard from animal shelters that pet surrenders from renters have gone up, so we're trying to save these pets and families."

Pet rents vary widely across Colorado, with most renting households paying between \$35 to \$100 a month. Some renters pay deposits as high as \$1,500, Jaquez Lewis said.

Senate Democrats approved the measure on Wednesday after the House passed it in March. Opponents included Republicans and some other Democrats, who worried the caps were too low to protect landlords from pet damage.

Senate minority leader Paul Lundeen said the measure was too heavy-handed and infringed on property owners' rights.

"These are complicated circumstances and we're stepping into millions of transactions," Lundeen said. "And it may have nothing to do with the reality of the circumstances."

Other opponents argued it would dissuade more landlords from allowing pets on properties in general. The bill doesn't stop property owners from restricting certain breeds or not allowing pets at all.

Research shows that a [majority of renters](#) in the U. S. own pets. Most take care of their animals and a small pet deposit around \$35 a month is enough to cover everyday wear and tear on a unit, said Tamera Greene, a board member of the Apartment Association of Metro Denver.

"Most people love their pets," she said. "It's a rare situation where a few outliers may exceed a \$300 deposit."

The landlord association was one of several industry groups that opposed early versions of the bill that sought to eliminate pet rent altogether. Sponsors scrapped that version shortly after introduction, as well as a version that would have limited pet fees to 1 percent of a tenant's monthly rent.

Allowing 1.5 percent creates a balanced transaction between renters, who want an affordable way to house their pets, and landlords, who want to protect their investments, said Greene, who helps manage hundreds of units along the Front Range for a national company.

"It may create savings for the resident," she said. "And hopefully for us it doesn't increase our expenses on our side for wear and tear of our apartments."

Supporters of the bill said despite the concessions, the final measure still accomplishes their mission of making it more affordable for renters to keep pets a part of their families.

Shelters and organizations like the [Dumb Friends League in Denver](#) have seen shelter turnovers jump in recent years due to residents facing rising housing costs, Jaquez Lewis said.

"They were all of a sudden having a large number of pets just dropped off at these shelters from people that were either moving or being evicted," she said.

Jaquez Lewis said the measure has also brought more awareness to the rise in need for shelter adoptions. Testimony in support of the bill also featured an actual shelter dog inside the Capitol, a terrier named Queso.

“I think that was a first,” she said. “We have to think through, okay, what's the cause of this? And what can we reasonably do to fix it? And in this case, we think that we've taken at least some good first steps.”

The bill, [HB 23-1068](#), will head back to the House on Friday for final approval of Senate amendments before it's placed in front of Gov. Jared Polis to sign.