September 17, 2020

Mayor and City Council
City of West Hollywood
8300 Santa Monica Blvd
West Hollywood, CA 90069

Via Electronic Communication at council@weho.org

RE: Item 4E - URGENCY ORDINANCE AMENDING PROVISIONS OF THE RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL MORATORIUM ON EVICTIONS

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council:

On behalf of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), I am writing to express our support for your motion to provide eviction protections and expand housing opportunities for households living with pets. The actions would provide a much-needed safety net for renters with companion animals so that they do not have to struggle with the choice of keeping a roof over their head or relinquishing their pet to a shelter. We thank the City Council for its leadership in acknowledging the significant role that the City can take in avoiding this grim decision.

Founded in 1866, the ASPCA was the first humane society to be established in North America and is today one of the largest in the world. The ASPCA believes that pets and people belong together; that financial circumstances alone are not reliable indicators of the capacity to love and care for a companion animal, and that strong bonds between people and pets make for stronger communities.

Unfortunately, every year tens of thousands of dogs and cats are relinquished to California’s animal shelter due to housing-related issues. A national study conducted by the ASPCA revealed that those who rent are more likely to need to rehome their pets for housing issues than for any other reason. A primary housing issue cited by families relinquishing is financial eviction from their current housing and a lack of suitable pet-friendly alternatives in the rental market. For example, in Los Angeles, housing was a reason given for roughly 23 percent of dog surrenders and 19 percent of cat surrenders between 2011 and 2015. This equates to approximately 30,000 dogs and cats being surrendered each year in Los Angeles alone. Historically, 50% of these pets will ultimately be euthanized.

From our direct care of companion animals, our work with animal welfare agencies, veterinarians, law enforcement and policy makers and our own research, we have learned that there are a variety of challenging circumstances that can cause pets to lose their homes. Poverty, short term emergencies, illness, lack of affordable, accessible vet care, and a shortage of pet friendly housing can conspire to force even the most devoted pet owner to relinquish a beloved pet to a local shelter or rescue group.

The COVID pandemic has resulted in a confluence of factors that put enormous pressure on the ability for many households to maintain their current housing situation. Unprecedented job loss and widespread illness and the resulting financial stresses will undoubtedly mean missed rent and mortgage payments and the threat of eviction and foreclosure. These public health and unemployment crises have
exacerbated already severe housing conditions for renters, especially low-income renters. The lack of supply of new housing has resulted in historically low vacancies and high rents in the rental market. While many renters may have difficulty finding suitable housing options in the market, those households with pets are confronted with an even greater challenge. The tight rental market means landlords can be more discerning in the types of households they rent to and often exclude potential tenants with pets.

The need to transition from one residence to another due to crisis induced factors such as finances and health and safety concerns takes an enormous toll on the entire family. Each of these factors, let alone several of them occurring in tandem, may force heart wrenching choices, such as relinquishment of pets to shelters, which in turn, may become overburdened with the unanticipated influx of animals. These negative impacts will undoubtedly be felt the most by those among us with the lowest income.

The City has at its discretion the ability to temporarily avoid these impacts, providing renters with time to deliberately consider their options rather than reacting in urgency. Your actions will strengthen your community and improve public health outcomes for those households affected. We thank you for your leadership in bringing this item forward so that fewer West Hollywood households are faced with the difficult decision of giving up their pet and keeping a roof over their head.

Sincerely,

Susan Lea Riggs
Senior Legislative Director, Western Region