



Contact:

Margot DeConna, MBA, CFRE
margot@humanesocietyncfl.org
352-415-2460

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Humane Society of North Central Florida highlights pet care in push for renter protections, rental assistance, and affordable housing in Alachua County

[Gainesville, Florida] August 25, 2020 – The COVID-19 pandemic is putting millions of pets in Alachua County and across the country at risk of being surrendered to animal shelters by the families who love them, but may be forced to choose between finding a place to live and keeping their pets.

The ability of people in Alachua County and other communities across the country to cover the costs of pet care and related expenses has been drastically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the pandemic has exacerbated affordable housing shortages that already existed for renters across the country, including in Gainesville and all of Alachua County, low-income households have often had to choose between paying rent and buying groceries, medicine and other necessities—including pet-related expenses.

As such, the Humane Society of North Central Florida supports increased rental assistance and a moratorium on evictions for low-income renters in Alachua County experiencing increased housing insecurity because of the pandemic, urges landlords to remove restrictions of pets in rental units and asks community members who are in a position to help to consider long-term fostering to help families in crisis find a temporary caregiver for their pets rather than being forced to surrender them.

The poverty and structural inequality that puts low-income, Black, and Latinx community-members at a greater risk of being affected by COVID-19 also create barriers to finding safe, affordable, and pet-friendly [housing](#). According to the [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#), in Florida in 2019 there were only 26 units of affordable housing available for every 100 extremely low-income households in our state. Meanwhile only 9% of rental housing across the country allowed companion animals without any significant limitations on size or type. Most tenants (82%) with animals reported having trouble finding a rental unit that would accept their pets.

Each year millions of pets enter animal shelters, and one of the most frequently cited reason for relinquishment is a housing, moving or landlord issue. To keep pets in their homes, animal welfare organizations assert on one crucial point: When families are ripped apart, both humans and pets experience detrimental effects on their physical and emotional wellbeing.

“We are already seeing pets being returned to the Humane Society because their owners can no longer afford to keep them or have been forced to move to housing that does not allow pets. It’s truly heartbreaking to see families ripped apart,” said Heather Thomas, executive director of the Humane Society of North Central Florida.

Landlords can minimize such risk by removing barriers such as breed and size restrictions in the case of renters with pets and by reducing fees in order to give renters with pets more opportunities to find safe housing. Now, more than ever, renters would benefit from increased support and fewer limitations.

Animal advocates and other members of the public can help by engaging groups like the Humane Society of North Central Florida and calling on our City and County Commissions to advocate for rental assistance and an eviction moratorium in Gainesville and Alachua County to ensure that low-income renters—and their pets—have safe and affordable housing in rental homes with pet-friendly policies. Learn more about national-level actions through groups like [Opportunity Starts at Home](#), [National Housing Law Project](#), [Eviction Lab](#) and [Just Shelter](#).

About the Humane Society of North Central Florida

The Humane Society of North Central Florida was created in 2018 when the leadership of the Alachua County Humane Society, Gainesville Pet Rescue, and Helping Hands Pet Rescue decided to permanently join forces. By becoming the Humane Society of North Central Florida, our organizations were able to effectively streamline services for pets and pet owners, eliminate any duplication of services, maximize our community’s resources, and improve the life-saving abilities of the entire region.

Our founding organizations have been dedicated to serving pets in Alachua County for more than 40 years. The Humane Society of North Central Florida is a limited intake, no-kill animal rescue shelter. The animals in our facility are transferred from open-intake and/or managed admission municipal shelters across North Central Florida. The Humane Society of North Central Florida is an independent, local 501(c)(3) organization. As such, we do not receive funding from federal agencies, nor are we affiliated with any other state or national organizations such as the Humane Society of the United States or the ASPCA.