

### SUPPORT HB 4912 (THAPEDI)

The Chicagoland Apartment Association supports HB 4912 (Rep. Andre Thapedi), the Assistance and Service Animal Integrity Act, which addresses a lack of clarity in laws governing emotional support animals and provides apartment owners the ability to verify a disability and need for an assistance animal from residents who request them.

Emotional support animals are a type of assistance animal that provide emotional support to alleviate symptoms of a person's disability. According to the federal Fair Housing Act, disabled persons who require an assistance animal may request a reasonable accommodation for the animal from their rental housing provider. If a resident is eligible for the request, the apartment owner is required to permit the disabled person to live with and use an assistance animal in all areas where the resident is normally allowed to go. Any conditions and restriction that housing providers apply to pets, including pet deposits or fees and size and breed restrictions, may not be applied to assistance animals.

CAA strongly supports the rights of persons with disabilities to make reasonable accommodation requests. However, apartment owners have seen a significant increase in reasonable accommodation requests for emotional support animals in recent years, some from residents with dubious claims, for avoiding pet fees, deposits, breed and size limitations. In some cases, residents supply reasonable accommodation request documentation in the form of a letter purchased online for a fee, provided with little or no contact with a mental health professional or person qualified to make a diagnosis.

Current laws and guidance related to emotional support animals allows for such abuse and imposes an undue burden on apartment owners. This undermines the intent of fair housing and disability rights laws to help those truly in need of an emotional support animal.

HB 4912 addresses the problem by allowing apartment owners to verify that the individual certifying the resident's need for an emotional support animal has an actual treatment relationship with the resident.

- Reasonable accommodation requests from tenants for emotional support animals has increased significantly in recent years. Some residents present dubious certification of a disability to avoid pet fees, deposits, breed and size limitations.
- Currently, there is a lack of clarity in laws governing how landlords can verify a tenant's disability and the need for an emotional support animal without fear of violating a resident's fair housing and disability rights.
- This legislation allows apartment owners to verify that the individual certifying the resident's need for an emotional support animal has an actual treatment relationship with the resident.