



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

## Information for Maryland Dog Owners

The Maryland Court of Appeals recently declared “pit bull” dogs “inherently dangerous” and extended financial responsibility for their actions to landlords and other property owners. This information sheet is intended to help renters who may be facing a change in their pet policy as a result of this ruling.



### What to Do

First, know your rights! Your landlord or insurance company cannot simply force you to give up your dog; you have legal rights as a tenant, and the correct legal processes must be followed before you or your pet can be evicted. Maryland renters can find more specific information about their rights in The HSUS’ factsheet entitled “Important Information for Maryland Renters and Dog Owners” ([humanesociety.org/rentwithdogs](http://humanesociety.org/rentwithdogs)).

### Temporary Placement

If your dog cannot stay in your rental unit with you, your best option will be to place her temporarily with a friend or family member, preferably outside the state of Maryland. If you have to temporarily place your dog with someone inside the state, choose a person who owns their own home, since another renter may end up facing eviction themselves. Here are some tips for approaching others about taking care of your dog until you can take her back:

- Talk with friends and family who either own their own homes or who live outside of the state about the possibility of holding your dog for you temporarily. It will be easiest for someone else to take care of your dog for you if she is up to date on vaccinations, treated with flea and tick preventative, and spayed or neutered. When possible, offer to come over and walk the dog, clean the area she stays in, transport her there, and provide food and other supplies.
- If friends or family are uncertain about having your dog in their home, offer creative solutions like training sessions or provide a crate for the dog to stay in while no one is at home. For tips on helping your dog adjust to spending time in a crate see The HSUS’ tip sheet on crate training at [humanesociety.org/cratetraining](http://humanesociety.org/cratetraining).
- Explore whether moving to a rental property just over the border in a neighboring state like West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, or D.C. might be an option. None of these states have breed-specific laws in effect; however you should be sure to research local animal licensing laws or other regulations that you will have to comply with.
- If you can afford it, call local boarding facilities to ask for their rates and to see if they are still willing to accept pit bull-type dogs. If they are not, expand your search to kennels out of state. Some kennels may be willing to provide a discounted boarding rate if you explain your situation.

When you do find a temporary placement for your dog:

- Be sure to have a written agreement in place outlining the temporary pet care arrangement. The agreement should cover important issues such as what will happen to your dog if the temporary caregiver can no longer care for her, who is liable for any damage done by your dog, what will happen if you are permanently unable to reclaim your dog, and what happens if your dog is injured or dies while in the temporary home. Check out a sample agreement here: [humanesociety.org/fosteragreement](http://humanesociety.org/fosteragreement) ».
- Complete a dog personality profile to help your dog's caretaker understand her particular needs, including her likes and dislikes, where she sleeps, what she eats, what medications she takes, and all other important information. [humanesociety.org/dogprofile](http://humanesociety.org/dogprofile) »
- Make sure that your dog is spayed or neutered and is up-to-date on all vaccinations, and provide the caretaker with a full copy of her veterinary records. Find low cost spay/neuter resources in your area: [humanesociety.org/where\\_to\\_spay\\_neuter](http://humanesociety.org/where_to_spay_neuter) »
- Outfit your dog with a collar and tag with the caretaker's contact information. Also, make sure your pet is wearing a rabies tag and/or license as required by law in the caretaker's community.
- Advise the caretaker on how to reach your dog's veterinarian, and ensure that your vet knows that the caretaker is authorized to make veterinary decisions on your behalf. You should similarly notify the caretaker's veterinarian as well as their local emergency after-hours clinic, in case treatment is required before your pet can reach her regular veterinarian. Arrange who will pay for routine and emergency care; consider leaving your credit card information (with set dollar limits, of course) with your veterinarian so your pet can receive emergency care if needed, and give instructions for what should happen if the care required exceeds that set dollar limit.
- Provide the caretaker with money for food, toys, grooming, and other routine needs, either as a lump sum payment up front or on a regular monthly schedule.

### Permanent Rehoming

If there is no friend or family member available to take your dog temporarily, you may have no choice but to consider permanently placing her with a new family. Remember, finding a new home in Maryland is going to be a challenge at this time, but don't give up trying! Advertise first through friends, neighbors, and local veterinarians before using your local newspaper or internet site, since your chances of finding a good home increase when you are able to check references with someone you know. And be mindful that giving your dog to another renter in Maryland may put your dog at risk of being evicted a second time, definitely not a good option for them or the dog. To better determine if the placement will be right for your dog, follow these recommendations:

- **Visit the prospective new home** in order to get a feel for the environment in which your dog will be living. Explain that she is part of your family and that you want to make sure she will respond positively to her new home. If the person does not allow you to visit, do not place your dog there.
- **Carefully consider all the elements of the new home.** Will your pet get along with small

children in the home? Is the family planning to keep her in the house or chained outside? Does the family have a positive veterinary reference? Will they let you stop by and see her, or send you pictures and updates? Do not be shy about asking questions. Your dog's life and happiness depend on it.

- **Require some paperwork.** Ask to see identification, preferably a driver's license, and record that information. You may ask the new owner to sign a contract stating the requirements of care upon which you both agree (although enforcing such contracts can be difficult); as part of the contract, require the new owner to contact you if he decides at some point that they must give up the dog.
- **Ensure your dog is neutered or spayed** before going to the new home. This will eliminate the chances that your pet is being adopted only for irresponsible breeding.
- **Call their local municipal animal control to see if the person has a record of cruelty to animals.** Even if the agency cannot disclose that information over the phone, you may be able to submit a written request for information under the applicable freedom of information law to obtain any relevant records.
- **Don't be fooled.** If warning flags go up (e.g., the person refuses to allow you to visit their home, or you find their references are questionable), do not place your dog there! While cruelty toward adopted pets fortunately does not happen often, it does occur, so checking references, visiting the home where your pet will live, and watching the new family interact with your dog are all very important. And of course, always be mindful of your own safety when you go to interview potential adopters or if you allow a prospective adopter to enter your home.
- **Remember that if your pet is old, chronically ill, or has a challenging personality, it may be difficult to find him a suitable home.** A new owner may not be willing or able to deal with these issues, and it may also be difficult for your dog to adjust to his new home; the last thing you want is for your dog to end up chained outside or abandoned entirely because their new adopter overestimated their ability to deal with her issues. The decision to humanely euthanize such a pet may actually be the kindest alternative, although it should not be made without thoughtful input from a veterinarian, a behaviorist, and your family.
- **Giving your dog to a shelter or a rescue should be your last resort.** Shelters and rescues are professional organizations where your dog will be well taken care of, but there may be many other dogs in the same predicament, making it very challenging for the shelter to find yours a loving new home. Be sure to ask about their processes, including how long they will hold your dog and what they will do to try and find a home for her, and make sure you can live with their answers before you leave your pet with them.

**No matter what, never turn a dog loose to fend for herself** – dogs are not equipped for life alone on the street. If you see someone else turning their dog loose, call your local animal shelter or animal control agency immediately so they can help to ensure the dog remains safe.