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Rediscover the pit bull.

For Rent: No Pit Bulls Allowed

By Micaela Myers

Housing discrimination – isn't that illegal? Luckily it is for humans, but unfortunately landlords often judge canines on looks alone. "I had one guy that wouldn't even let me look at his house because of my [pit bull] Jodi being in the car," comments Jenny Sanders of Friendswood, Texas. "The places we visited were very welcoming until we told them we had a pit bull, then the mood would always change," adds Nicolle Berlute-Shea, of Lakewood, Colo. "You could actually watch people physically stiffen with the mention of the name pit bull." Stories like these flooded into my inbox when I posted a query on Pit Bull Rescue Central's Facebook page, asking dog lovers from across the country to share their experiences as renters.



"We looked through hundreds of apartments and houses using the Internet and newspaper ads," Berlute-Shea recounts. "We also used an apartment finding service. We could only find two places that would accept pit bulls."

From New York to California and everywhere in between, respondents had one thing in common: Breed-based discrimination made their search for rentals a long and difficult task. Of course, this isn't just a pit bull problem.

Commercial apartment complexes often have long lists of other breeds they won't accept. "It's difficult enough to find a place that will allow large dogs, but then it's nearly impossible to find one that doesn't have breed restrictions," says Marcelina Marquez of San Diego, Calif. "Finding housing that will allow me to have pit bulls has been a daunting experience." "I found that all the apartment complexes I contacted had breed restrictions stating they did not allow 'aggressive breeds,'" adds Sheilah Hutchinson of Austin, Texas. "This is a term I do not agree with at all; there is no such thing as an 'aggressive breed.'" The good news is that after much persistence, the majority of those interviewed did eventually find a place to live.

However, many reported having to pay more in rent or deposits than they'd hoped, while others had to settle for a substandard rental or one outside their preferred area. "You can't be picky if you own this breed and are looking to rent," says Laura Berkeley of Oceanside, Calif. "I have had to move to areas outside of the city or pay extra in pet deposits in order to keep my dogs with me," Hutchinson concurs.



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By way of advice, many renters suggest going through an individual property owner versus a large apartment complex.

"I have found that it is easier to find pet friendly housing through independent property owners," comments Katie Bray of Lawrence, Kan. "If there is a big company that owns several complexes throughout the area, it is less likely that they care about their renters and are willing to meet you and negotiate. More often than not, the independent property owner is open to a pet interview... The number one thing is to show them you care. The next thing is to show them that you are a responsible pet owner."

Although some of those interviewed literally faced homelessness due to housing discrimination, most were unwilling to break up their families.

"It is hard but totally worth it," Juli Goodrich of Tukwila, Wash., says of the search for pit-friendly housing.

"I would rather live in my car with my dogs than in a mansion without them."

Listen Up, Landlords

All these tales of discrimination also lead to the larger question: How can we change the cycle of breed prejudice in the housing market? Although it's not a quick fix, education is key. Some landlords are open to expanding their knowledge beyond the media hype they've heard. Others may be willing to meet an applicant's dog, and getting to know a few well-behaved representatives of the breed could make all the difference for them.

And there's something in it for them, too. Landlords willing to consider responsible owners and their well-behaved large dogs gain access to a whole new pool of eager renters.

"We pay more, value our residence more and are more willing to help/pay for improvements that benefit our dogs," Goodrich claims. "We stay longer and refer more people than pet-less renters. Don't rely on the news stories," she urges landlords. "Meet potential tenants' dogs before deciding."

"Landlords should know that discriminating against pet owners makes no sense, and pet ownership can actually be an indicator in whether you might have a good tenant on your hands," says Amber M. of Eureka, Calif. "Responsible pet owners realize the importance of maintaining appropriate housing for themselves and their pets' wellbeing. They also make appropriate measures to ensure they are not displaced, as finding replacement housing may take some time."



Photo by Courtney A. Kerr



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Case in point: A relative of mine recently found out the value of non-discriminatory practices first hand. She needed to rent her townhouse out quickly, but with 1,400 listings on the local Craigslist, how could she make her rental stand out? I suggested she advertise her willingness to consider large dogs of any breed. Sure enough, a Marine contacted her almost immediately. He was looking for a rental for himself, his wife, their 1-year-old daughter and their American Staffordshire terrier. They couldn't live on base due to the breed ban and hadn't had any luck finding a decent rental. Their dog had been in boarding for weeks. They had excellent credit and turned out to be the perfect renters. When he was deployed, the house and yard were left in pristine condition, and my relative refunded their full pet and security deposit.

"Like any stigma, discrimination or stereotype, it's going to take time for it to go away," Marquez says of the current discriminatory policies facing pit bull owners. "It's amazing to think the pit bull used to be 'America's dog,' and now people cringe at the sight or even the sound of the name. I just hope people will become more open and educated about the breed so that ridiculous breed restriction [policies] can go away."

Tips for Finding Pit-Friendly Housing

- Begin your search early, two to three months before you need to move.
- Look for a house, condo or townhouse rental, as private landlords are more likely to consider your pet than commercial apartment complexes. (If finances are tight, roommate situations are another option.)
- Post a housing wanted ad on Craigslist and/or similar sites. Be up front about the breed of your pet, and tell potential landlords why you'd make good tenants.
- Contact local bully breed rescue groups and/or post on their Facebook pages for local recommendations for pit-friendly housing.
- Train your dog well, and offer to let prospective landlords meet your dog (have any training certificates in hand).
- Offer to obtain rental or liability insurance, or pay an additional pet deposit.
- Don't lie about your dog's breed. If you do so, your landlord may evict you with short notice, leaving you without the proper time to find another rental.
- Lastly, when you do find a rental, be a responsible tenant and pet owner to help change opinions one landlord at a time!
- If you're buying, make sure the city and county (and the homeowners' association, if applicable), do not have breed restrictions.
- For more rental and housing tips visit: www.pbrsd.com/resources/housing.htm and www.badrap.org/rescue/renting_new.pdf.

Insurance Companies That Don't Discriminate

Many landlords blame the insurance companies for their discriminatory policies; however, I have confirmed via phone inquiries that the following companies do not discriminate based on breed:

State Farm

Farmers Insurance Group

United Services Automobile Association

Chubb Group

Note: State or local breed laws may impact coverage in certain areas. Also, while these insurance companies don't discriminate based on breed, most will exclude dogs with histories of past incidences.