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Pet Deposits Add Financial Burden for Renters in New Bill

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For countless Britons, pets are cherished family members, offering companionship to the elderly or joy to young children. Yet, for renters, keeping a pet often means navigating a minefield of restrictions and costs. The Renters' Rights Bill, currently under scrutiny, promised to ease these burdens by granting tenants the right to request a pet, which landlords cannot unreasonably refuse. However, a recent House of Lords amendment has introduced a steep financial hurdle: an additional three-week deposit for pet-owning renters,

pushing average upfront moving costs to £1,103. This move risks penalising tenants for choosing to share their lives with a pet.

The private rental sector is already a tough landscape for pet owners. With as many dogs in the UK as private renters, the demand for pet-friendly homes is undeniable. Yet, in some regions, only one in 20 rental properties is advertised as pet-friendly. This scarcity forces heartbreaking decisions. In a recent interview, Ben Twomey of Generation Rent shared the story of a pensioner faced with an agonising choice: surrender her beloved cat of five years or risk homelessness. Such stories highlight the human cost of restrictive rental policies, where tenants are often treated as lesser citizens compared to homeowners.

The Renters' Rights Bill initially offered hope, compelling landlords to consider pet requests reasonably. But the Lords' amendment, passed by a slim margin of eight votes, threatens to undermine this progress. The extra deposit, layered on top of the standard five-week deposit and moving costs, could deter renters from exercising their new rights. As rents climb, so too will these upfront costs, further squeezing tenants already grappling with financial pressures. This amendment, driven by landlord concerns over potential pet-related damage, ignores evidence that suggests otherwise.

Research from Battersea Dogs & Cats Home reveals that tenants with pets often bring landlords a net financial benefit of £3,800 over 12 years. Longer tenancies mean fewer vacancies, lower marketing costs, and steadier rental income. Pets also foster stronger community ties and better landlord-tenant relationships. In the Lords' debate, Baroness Taylor of Stevenage argued that existing deposits adequately cover typical pet-related damages, a stance backed by this research. The Labour government's apparent willingness to entertain this amendment, despite its stated goal of reducing renting costs, raises questions about its commitment to renters' interests.

On a brighter note, the government has scrapped a proposed requirement for pet-owning renters to purchase pet insurance, recognising that such products are not widely available. This decision spares tenants an additional expense, but it does little to offset the looming deposit increase. With over half of UK households owning a pet, the ability to live with a companion animal should not be a privilege reserved for homeowners or those able to pay exorbitant fees.

The Renters' Rights Bill still has a chance to deliver meaningful change, but only if the government stands firm against this punitive amendment. Renters deserve the right to enjoy

the companionship of pets without facing unfair financial penalties. As the Bill progresses, the hope is that reason prevails, ensuring that tenants are not priced out of the joy and comfort that pets bring.