

132nd Legislature
Senate
of Maine
Senate District 31

Senator Donna Bailey
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0003
Office: (207) 287-1515

Testimony of Senator Donna Bailey introducing
LD 824, An Act Regarding Pet Fees in Rental Housing
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development
Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Donna Bailey, and I proudly represent Senate District 31, which includes Buxton, Old Orchard Beach, and Saco. Today, I am pleased to introduce my bill LD 824, “An Act Regarding Pet Fees in Rental Housing.”

Over the past year, I have heard from many constituents about the housing crisis, something which members of this committee are familiar with. One of the factors at play that does not often come up is the excessive fee charged for a tenant to have a pet in their apartment.

LD 824 would improve access to rental housing for pet owners by capping excessive fees imposed by landlords and housing providers. It helps people and pets while setting reasonable limits. Landlords can collect a one-time, upfront refundable pet deposit of up to \$300. Landlords can also collect up to 1% of the monthly rent as pet rent.

According to Humane World for Animals, who will also be testifying on this bill, people frequently say they have had to relinquish a pet due to a housing, relocation, or landlord issue. In recent research, 97% of pet owners consider their pets members of their families, and many people make housing choices based on the needs of their pets.¹

Unfortunately, rising housing costs and stagnant wages have left countless renting families with pets without many options – either pay the exorbitant fees, sacrifice safety and/or stability, or relinquish beloved pets. These outcomes are unacceptable and are often a result of the limited amount of rental housing that welcomes pets.

Housing providers recognize the demand for pet-friendly accommodations and are often capitalizing on this trend by charging tenants various fees, including upfront non-refundable fees, refundable deposits, and monthly fees, making these units more difficult to access and largely unaffordable. That’s why we need measures that cap excessive, non-refundable pet fees. A cap would ensure fees remain fair and reasonable. We also need data-driven policies to inform rules

¹ https://www.humaneworld.org/sites/default/files/docs/HSUS_More-Than-a-Pet-Harris-Poll-2024.pdf

about pet-keeping in our communities.

As we know, rental housing costs are rapidly outpacing renter income. According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, since 2019, middle-income renters (earning between \$30,000 and \$74,999) have experienced the largest increase in cost-burden rates (meaning a household that spends more than 30% of its income on housing).²

Meanwhile, lower-income renters earning less than \$30,000 annually saw their cost-burden rate increase by 1.5 percentage points, reaching 83 percent. Among them, 65 percent faced severe burdens, setting a new record. Since 2018, the rental cost burden has increased sharply with many Maine households spending more than 30% of their income on housing.³

Animal shelters are acutely aware of the housing crisis and the impact that housing insecurity has on their work. Pet-related fees are a major contributor to pet relinquishment. When fees are charged, the majority of people who have relinquished a pet report that exorbitant monthly pet fees are barriers to housing.⁴

With LD 824, we can take a step to lower costs for pet owners who rent the roof over their heads.

I thank the Committee for its time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.



Donna Bailey
State Senator, Senate District 31
Buxton, Old Orchard Beach, and Saco

² <https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/blog/rising-costs-homeownership-are-increasing-burdens>

³ https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard_JCHS_Americas_Rental_Housing_2024.pdf

⁴ https://www.humaneworld.org/sites/default/files/docs/HSUS_More-Than-a-Pet-Harris-Poll-2024.pdf

The Humane Society of the United States: More Than A Pet

Prepared for the Humane Society of the United States by The Harris Poll

March 25, 2024

Methods

Audience



2,042 U.S. adults age 18+ including pet owners (n=1,377)

Mode



The research was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll via Harris On Demand Omnibus platform on behalf of the Humane Society of the US

Weighting



Data have been weighted to be representative of U.S. adults age 18+

Statistically significant differences by subgroup are identified throughout by letter or in yellow callout boxes. For full data breakdowns by all subgroups, see data tables.

Method Statement (to be included in all press materials)

The research was conducted online in the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of HSUS among 2,042 U.S. adults. The survey was conducted March 19 – 21, 2024.

Data are weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, and household income to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within ± 2.7 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

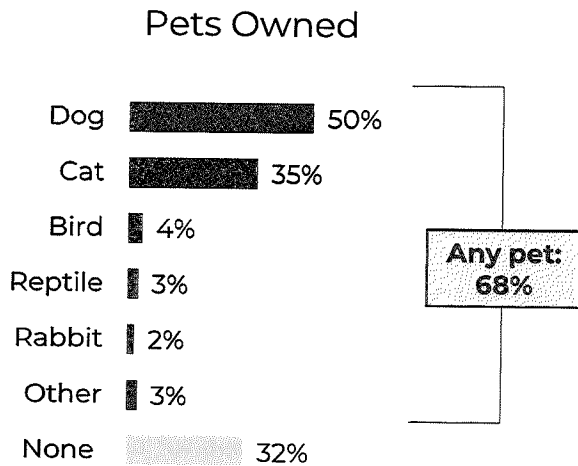
All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Key Findings

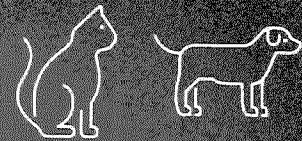
- **Pets are a part of people's families**, and they are willing to make sacrifices both big and small for these important family members.
- There is a **severe lack of awareness** about the large numbers of **pets currently living in poverty**, even among pet owners, with only 28% of Americans being aware of this crisis.
- Even though most Americans are unaware that many pets live in poverty, **39% of owners say there are things they have not been able to pay for that their pet needed**. This primarily includes emergency/preventative veterinary care, vaccines, and expensive food/supplements.
- However, the majority of Americans agree that **one's financial situation shouldn't impact their ability to have a pet** as long as they care for them and love them. Moreover, there is agreement that **owners shouldn't have to lose their pet if they fall on hard times financially**.
- Ultimately, **shelters are overcrowded**, and therefore three-quarters of adults agree that **socio-economic status shouldn't prevent pet adoption**.
- Regardless of their financial situation **pet owners are willing to give up a lot in order to keep their pets**. This can range from minor day to day things like foregoing a fancy coffee and/or ordering lunch/dinner, to **making major sacrifices like spending less on their own needs, and even taking out loans or going into debt**.
- In order to sustain **higher levels of pet adoption** among those across the socio-economic spectrum, more than 9 in 10 Americans agree that **there should supports** – similar to those for adults impacted by poverty and inequality like shelters and community organizations – **available for pets in need. This should alleviate some of the financial burden on owners**.

It is well recognized that pets are full-fledged members of people's families.

Almost 7 in 10 Americans own a pet, and most, according to a 2023 Pew Research Survey, nearly all consider their pets part of their family.



According to a 2023 Pew Research Center study, 97% of U.S. pet owners say that their pets are part of their family.

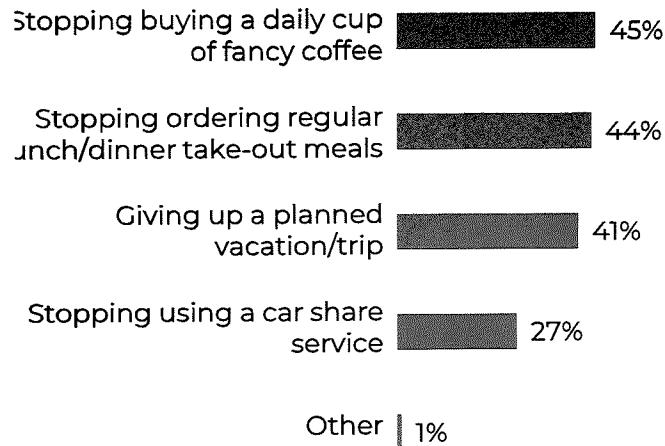


Owners are willing to give up certain daily luxuries and even much larger life tradeoffs for their pets.

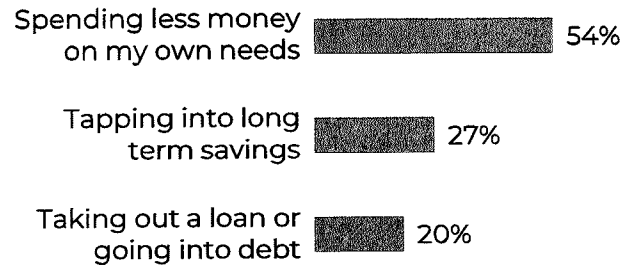
The majority of owners would sacrifice their own money – by spending less on their own needs – to keep their pet.

91% of Owners Would Make Sacrifices To Keep Pet, Including...

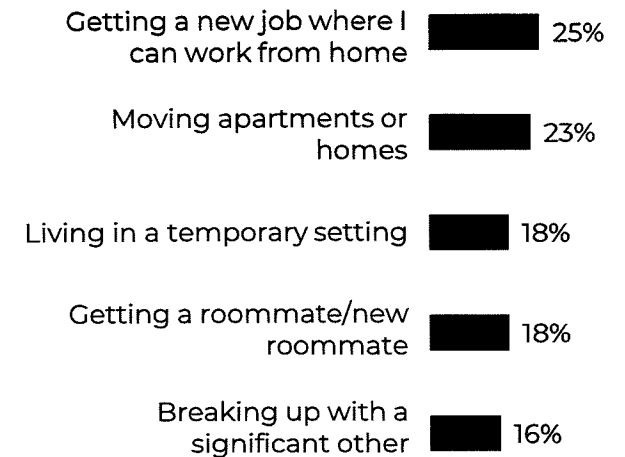
Daily Luxuries: 71%



Own Money: 64%



Living/Relationship/Job Situation: 46%

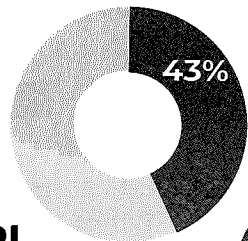


However, pets can be an expensive endeavor, especially when it comes to their healthcare.

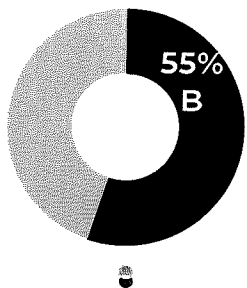
Over half of owners living below the poverty line have been unable to pay for something their pets needs.

Ever Been Unable To Pay

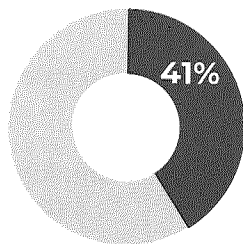
Pet Owners



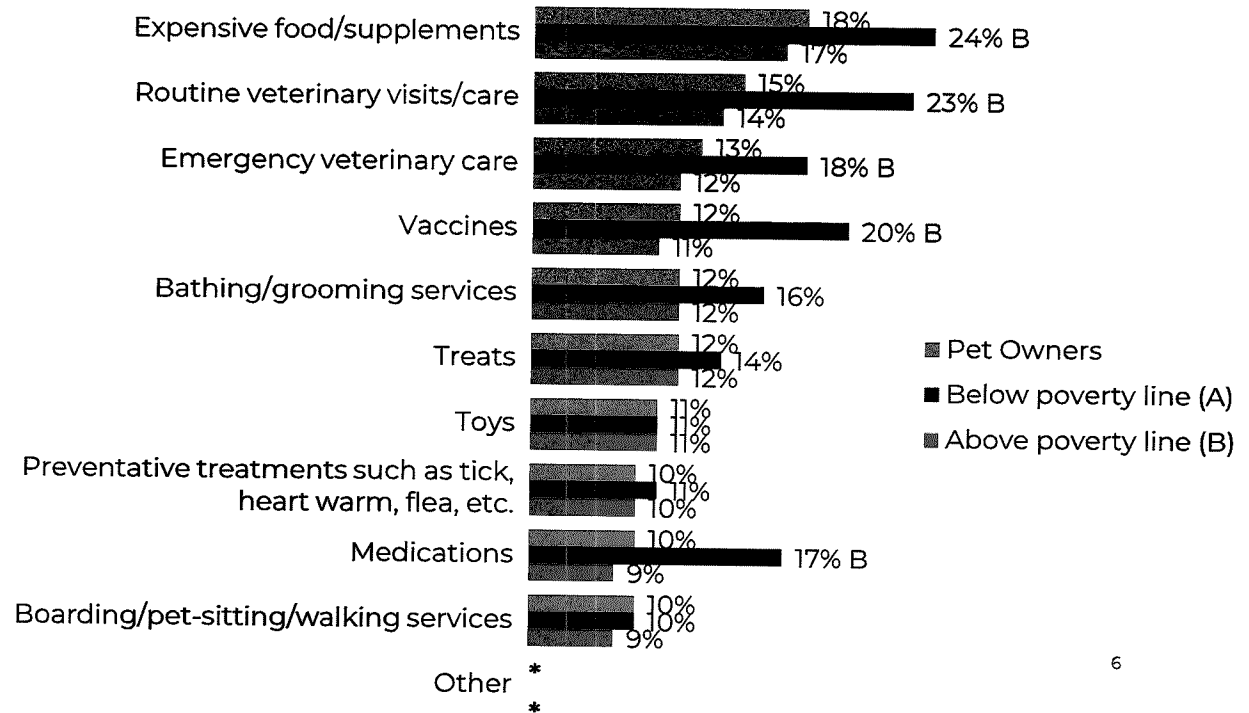
Below PL (A)



Above PL (B)

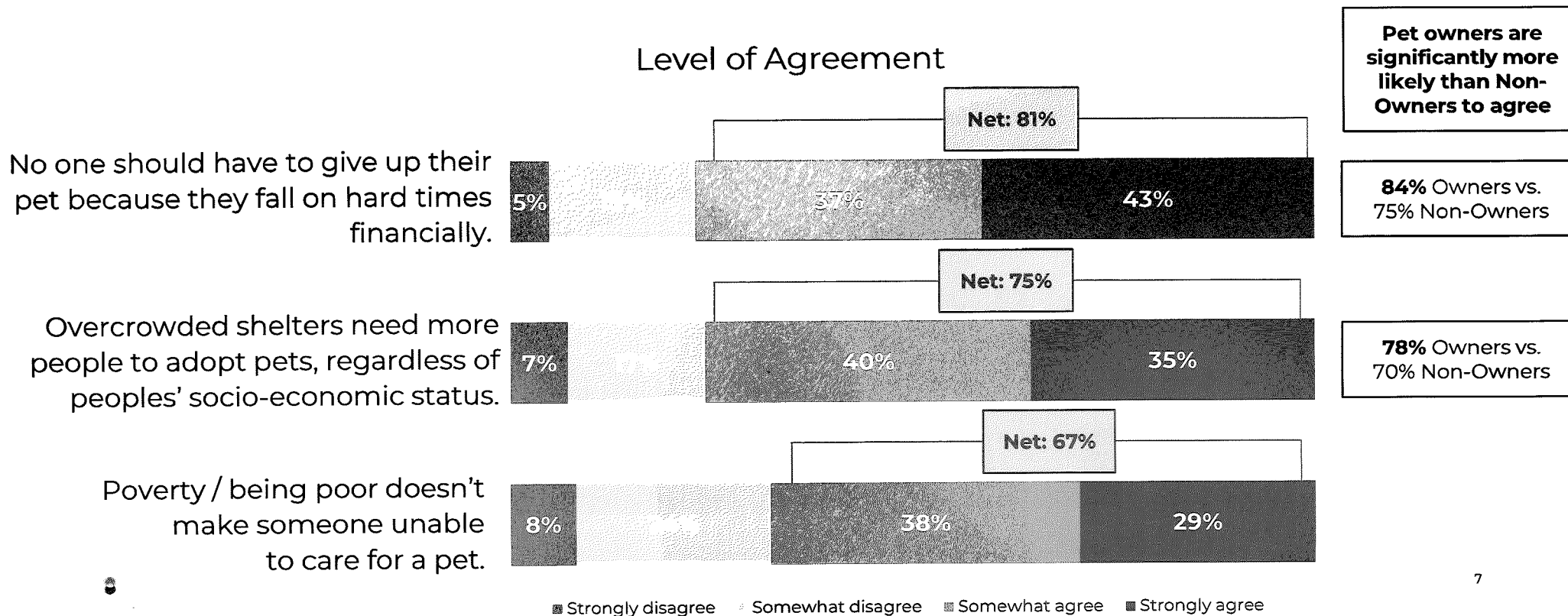


Unable to Pay For...



Americans agree that one's financial situation shouldn't impact their ability to keep/care for a pet.

Especially given that shelters are overcrowded and need more people to adopt, regardless of financial status.



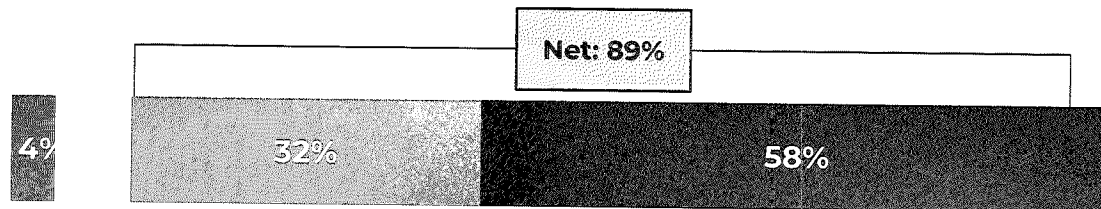
Moreover, adults agree sharing love and joy with pets should be all that's needed and accessible to all.

Nearly 3 in 5 **strongly agree** every pet owner deserves to keep their pet if they provide love and care.

Level of Agreement

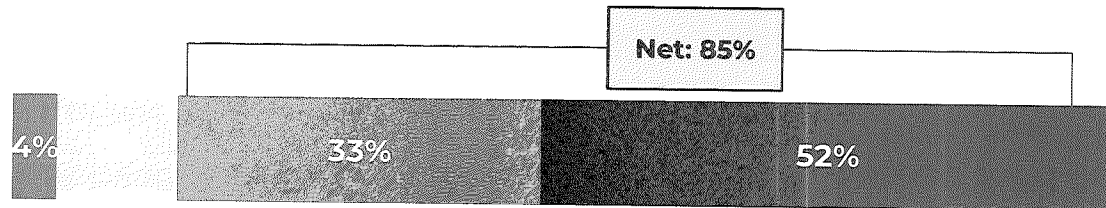
Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

All pet owners deserve to keep their pets as long as they provide them with love and care.



Those above the poverty line are significantly more likely to agree
91% APL vs. 84% BPL

Everyone should be able to experience the joy of the bond with a pet.



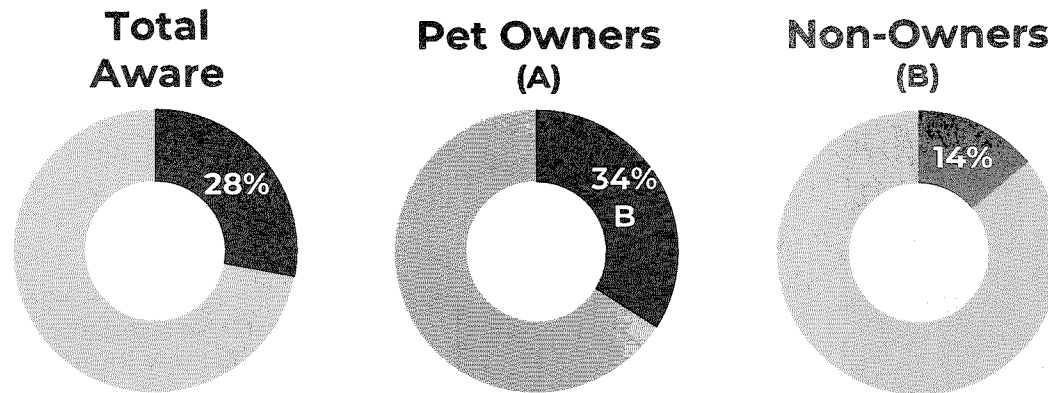
Owners are significantly more likely to agree
87% Owners vs. 80% Non-Owners

Only around a quarter of Americans, even pet owners, are aware of the national pet poverty crisis.

While numbers are low overall, pet owners are more likely than non-owners to know many owners are unable to afford or access veterinary services.

Awareness

20 million pets are living in poverty, of which 70 percent have never seen a veterinarian.



Americans living below the poverty line are **significantly more likely** to be aware of this crisis: 36% BPL vs. 26% APL

Challenges:

Most people are aware of how **poverty** and **inequality** create challenges and **barriers to accessing healthy food, education, jobs, health care and housing for people.**

In response to these challenges, **there are support systems** like shelters and community organizations **to help people when they fall on hard times.**

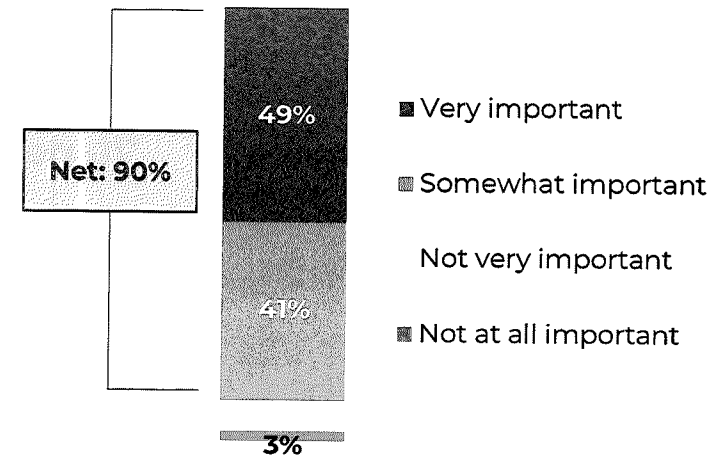
Americans think it's important to have similar supports for pets in need.

With about half saying this is *very important*.

Level of Importance

Having similar support services available for pets that need help.

For example access to vet care, vaccinations, food, pet essentials, etc.



Owners and those living above the poverty line are significantly more likely to agree

92% Owners vs. 85% Non-Owners

91% APL vs. 86% BPL