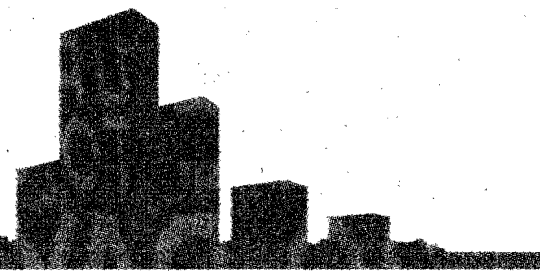


Hi-Riser



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Disputes continue over pets in condos

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Deerfield Beach resident Phyllis Schleifer just wanted to keep her dog.

She ended up taking her fight to court.

In a lawsuit last month, Schleifer took on her association, the Ventnor H. Condominium Association in Deerfield Beach, part of Century Village, in an effort to keep her dog, which was prescribed to her by her doctor as an emotional support animal.

Her problem isn't unique.

"So many associations deal with this problem," said Lisa Magill, an attorney with Becker & Poliakoff P.A., which specializes in condo and community association law. "It's becoming an increasing problem because boards don't have expertise on pet owners' rights. Emotional conditions are not always visible, and it's very difficult for boards to determine if

the animal will help."

One of the most contentious issues facing community associations is whether to permit owners to have pets as emotional support animals. Schleifer's lawsuit could have an impact on the way associations handle such matters.

"Associations need to understand that there are implications for not allowing special ac-

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commodations," Magill said. "They should have policies in place that deal with reasonable accommodations."

Magill said she recommends that associations draft policies that enable

owners to formally request special accommodations. She said the procedures that are put in place should be confidential and uniformly enforced.

As pet owners continue to fight for rights, Magill said the needs of all residents must be con-

sidered. She noted that some unit owners buy into communities specifically because they are pet-free. These owners may have health problems that make such communities appealing.

"It's more important now for boards to have the proper policies in

place," Magill said.

Maida Genser, founder and president of Citizens for Pets in Condos, a nonprofit organization that promotes the benefits of pet ownership in condos, said pets provide a unique kind of emotional support.

"The human-animal

bond is a warm feeling, and it's been with us for centuries," she said.

To help gather support, Citizens for Pets in Condos is collecting signatures on a petition, which condo residents can sign online at www.petsincondos.org.

Along with promoting

emotional support pets, Genser said the organization encourages pet-friendly associations to form committees aimed at helping reduce nuisance issues and educating owners.

"We encourage responsible pet ownership," Genser said.

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