



ILLINOIS SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE · HB4540

Testimony

in Support of

House Bill 4540

Companion Animal Custody Equity Act

Tameer Siddiqui, PsyD

Founder & Director, Rosie's Law Initiative · rosieslaw.us

Good afternoon, Chair Hastings and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Thank you, Senator Holmes, for sponsoring this bill. Thank you all for the invitation to provide my testimony regarding HB4540, the Companion Animal Custody Equity Act.

My name is Dr. Tameer Siddiqui. I am the founder and director of Rosie's Law Initiative.

WHO I AM

I want to begin with clarity about who I am — by starting with who I am not.

I am not an animal lover in the way people expect. I eat meat. I support fireworks. In my field, that alone can be enough to dismiss me.

But I spent over two years working in a VA hospital PTSD unit, sitting with veterans and their service dogs. What I witnessed was not animals shielding people from reality, or people shielding animals.

It was both of them... learning how to stay in the world together. That is what a real bond does.

I say this as a psychologist with my own PTSD diagnosis... and as someone who has a formal designation of Rosie as my service animal.

But this testimony is not about me. It is ultimately about Rosie.

ROSIE

Rosie is a thirteen-year-old puggle — a pug-beagle mix. She is the reason I am here today and the reason behind Rosie's Law Initiative, which played a leading advocacy and policy-development role in the creation and advancement of HB4540, the Companion Animal Custody Equity Act, alongside legislative sponsors and supporters.

I met Rosie roughly seven years ago. By that point, she had already experienced repeated transitions between homes and caregivers. She struggled with severe separation anxiety and distress behaviors when separated from the person she depended on.

Over time, I became her primary caregiver.

At first, Rosie and I were both slow to trust each other. She was reactive, anxious, and difficult to approach. But as time passed, I consistently cared for her — fed her, walked her, monitored her routines, attended to her needs, and structured my life around her care.

When we all moved in together during the pandemic, that bond deepened further. For more than five years, I was Rosie's consistent day-to-day caregiver. Family, friends, neighbors, service providers, and others who regularly interacted with us observed that caregiving role firsthand.

When my relationship ended, Rosie initially remained with me. We continued our routines and daily life together.

Then, over a year ago, Rosie was taken from my care. I have not seen her since.

LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

After many unsuccessful attempts to resolve the matter privately, I went to court seeking a shared arrangement or some continued contact that would preserve Rosie's stability and well-being.

The court considered the evidence I submitted, including:

- Documentation of my long-term caregiving role;
- Affidavits from individuals familiar with Rosie's daily routines, including her dog sitter, dog groomer, and housekeeper;
- Veterinary records reflecting behavioral and medical decline following our separation;
- Research regarding separation distress in dogs;
- Documentation related to Rosie's role as my service animal.

Despite this, the judge ultimately ruled against me.

I want to be clear: I do not believe the judge acted improperly. He explicitly stated that he was constrained by the law as it currently exists. Because my former partner and I were never legally married, the court could not evaluate Rosie's well-being in the same way courts are permitted to during divorce proceedings under Illinois law.

THE GAP HB4540 ADDRESSES

Under current Illinois law, courts may consider the well-being of companion animals during marital dissolution proceedings. But unmarried couples, domestic partners, engaged couples, and long-term cohabiting partners do not receive the same consideration.

In those cases, companion animals are still treated strictly as personal property — the same legal category as furniture.

“More people are adopting animals and fewer people are getting married. That means the crack will only widen. HB4540 solves that problem.”

WHAT HB4540 DOES

HB4540 does not create a radical new legal framework. It simply extends an existing principle already recognized in Illinois family law: that courts should be allowed to consider caregiving history, attachment, continuity, and the well-being of the animal when resolving disputes.

This bill does not require courts to treat companion animals as children. It does not eliminate property rights. It gives judges limited discretion to evaluate evidence and make decisions grounded in the reality of modern caregiving relationships.

Companion animals are living beings with medical needs, behavioral attachments, and dependency relationships. Courts should be allowed to consider those realities.

HB4540 reflects the way many Illinois residents already understand these relationships. For countless people, companion animals are not interchangeable objects. They are bonded, dependent living beings whose stability and welfare are directly affected by caregiving continuity.

This bill also serves people facing serious emotional, psychological, or medical hardship connected to the loss of a companion animal. In my own case, the separation had significant consequences for both Rosie and me.

***Rosie will be 14 years old next month.
At her age, time is not theoretical. It is limited.***

I am asking this committee to support legislation that allows courts to consider the full reality of these relationships — instead of reducing them solely to ownership paperwork.

HB4540 gives judges the ability to evaluate evidence fairly, thoughtfully, and humanely.

I respectfully ask you to vote yes on House Bill 4540.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Tameer Siddiqui, PsyD

Founder & Director, Rosie's Law Initiative
rosieslaw.us

HB4540

Companion Animal Custody Equity Act
Illinois Senate Judiciary Committee · May 2026