

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing
Written Testimony Submitted to the New York State Legislature
In Support of a \$5,000,000 FY 2026–2027 Appropriation for a Statewide Co-Sheltering
Grant Program**

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My name is Jillian McMillian. I am submitting this testimony in support of including a \$5 million appropriation in the FY 2026–2027 New York State Budget to establish a statewide co-sheltering grant program so families experiencing homelessness can remain safely with their companion animals. My lived experience shows how devastating it is when families are forced to separate from their pets during housing crises.

My name is Jillian McMillian. I am a Long Island native residing in Rockville Center. I am an advocate for mental health, homelessness and domestic violence as I have lived experience of all three. I've had a few bouts of homelessness due to mental health concerns which I accrued due to having lived an adverse childhood.

In my last bout of homelessness, I was a single mom battling Post Traumatic Stress Disorder alongside other mental health disorders. My daughter and I had three cats at the time, two of which we'd raised for nine years and one we raised for two years. Those girls were everything to us. When we were wrongfully evicted, we had to put our girls into a foster home. I promised my daughter we would see them again and we would live with them again soon as I already had emotional support letters from my psychiatrist and the foster had said she would hold on to the girls "as long as it takes."

After several attempts to have my girls come stay with us at the shelter we lived in, it became obvious that the shelter workers weren't taking me seriously and the girls would have to stay in foster until I found us all a place to live.

During my second August there, I found out that one of our older girls passed away. The details were very confusing. I got one story from the foster's housemate, and another story a week later from the actual foster. All I know for sure is that one of my babies passed and I wasn't there with her. The other two girls were taken by the SPCA to a location I wouldn't find out until much later.

Months later after I proved ownership to the SPCA, they finally told me where the other two girls were. I was told they weren't going to be adopted out or anything because there was still a case going on. This officer that I was working with was very difficult to get in touch with. I would call, email, and fax then days later he would return my call. It was a vicious pattern. At one point, I had called the animal hospital where the girls were, just to check in while waiting to hear back from the officer. The woman who I spoke with had told me that the girls were adopted out. I

wanted to die right then and there. I explained that this wasn't supposed to happen. She was very nasty and didn't care what I had to say and eventually hung up.

I tried frantically to get ahold of the officer, but never heard from him again. To this day, I still grieve. I wonder if my girls are still alive. Are they happy? I flash to images of them being sad and my one girl who passed away is just laying there while the other two are trying to understand what happened. I wonder if my girl passed from a broken heart because we left them and we were all they knew. Six years later, my thoughts are just as vivid as if she died yesterday.

I tell this story and break my own heart every time for a reason. People should be able to stay with their pets. There is a bond that is so strong. Sometimes pets are all someone has to keep them going, to keep living. It can be a matter of life and death for them to stay together. If this program existed here, there would be a lot less people on the streets, sleeping in their cars, in tents at campsites during 3 degree weather. This program can save lives. It can help lower the population of animals in shelters and animals being put down. I've been in the position where I had to make the decision between life and love. No one should have to go through that.

I respectfully urge the Legislature to support S673/A1693 and related co-sheltering legislation and to include a \$5,000,000 appropriation in the FY 2026–2027 enacted budget to establish a statewide co-sheltering grant program — so no one has to choose between life and love.

Respectfully submitted,

Jillian McMillian
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