

There is no state-wide law in Michigan that limits the number of cats a person can legally own. Instead, this issue is governed by local ordinances at the city, township, or county level. Therefore, the legal limit on cat ownership depends entirely on the specific regulations in your municipality. Some cities have explicit numerical limits, while others have broader nuisance-based rules.

As an attorney at Knudtson & Associates, I often handle cases that arise from seemingly minor issues which escalate due to a misunderstanding of local regulations. Animal ownership laws are a prime example. While state law provides a broad framework, the specifics that affect residents day-to-day—like how many pets you can have—are almost always found in your local municipal code. This guide provides a factual breakdown of the legal landscape for cat ownership in Michigan, clarifying the hierarchy of laws and providing concrete examples from various cities.

### **The Core Issue: State Law vs. Local Ordinances**

The State of Michigan does not impose a numerical cap on cat ownership. State-level animal laws, such as the Michigan Penal Code (Act 328 of 1931), focus primarily on issues of animal cruelty, neglect, and ensuring adequate care. For instance, Section 750.50 of the Michigan Compiled Laws defines “adequate care” and sets penalties for neglect, which can be felonious depending on the number of animals involved and the severity of the conditions. However, the authority to set specific limits on the number of pets per household is delegated to local governments as part of their general police power to protect public health, safety, and welfare. This means that a resident in Detroit is subject to a different set of rules than a resident in Grand Rapids or a more rural township. It is a critical distinction that every pet owner must understand.

## Cat Ownership Limits in Major Michigan Cities

The following table outlines the specific ordinances for several Michigan municipalities. These regulations are subject to change, and it is always advisable to consult the most current version of your local code of ordinances. This data is provided for informational purposes.

<b>City/County</b>	<b>Number of Cats Allowed</b>	<b>Key Ordinance/Notes</b>	<b>Source (Municipal Code Reference)</b>
Detroit	Four (4) cats over the age of four months.	The limit is part of the "Xavier Strickland Memorial Animal Control Ordinance," which also sets a limit of four dogs.	Detroit City Code, Chapter 6, Sec. 6-1-11.
Warren	Three (3) cats over the age of six months.	The ordinance also specifies a total limit of five (5) animals (dogs and cats combined) per premises.	Warren Code of Ordinances, Chapter 7, Sec. 7-75.
East Lansing	Four (4) cats.	The ordinance allows for a total of four dogs or four cats, or a combination not exceeding a total of four.	East Lansing Code of Ordinances, Chapter 4, Sec. 4-4.
East Grand Rapids	Three (3) cats in a single-family dwelling. Two (2) in a multi-family unit.	The ordinance sets different limits based on the type of dwelling.	East Grand Rapids Code of Ordinances, Chapter 92, Sec. 9.36.

<b>City/County</b>	<b>Number of Cats Allowed</b>	<b>Key Ordinance/Notes</b>	<b>Source (Municipal Code Reference)</b>
Kalamazoo	No specific numerical limit.	The ordinance prohibits keeping a number of cats that cannot be cared for in a “sanitary and proper manner” or that creates a nuisance. This is a performance-based, not a numerical, standard.	Kalamazoo Code of Ordinances, Chapter 7, Sec. 7-34.
Ann Arbor	No specific numerical limit.	Ann Arbor’s code focuses on the proper care and control of animals rather than setting a hard cap on numbers for cats.	Ann Arbor Code of Ordinances, Chapter 107.

Many legal disputes involving pets arise not from malicious intent, but from a failure to verify local rules. Before acquiring a new pet, a five-minute review of your city’s online code of ordinances can prevent significant future conflict and potential legal liability. By GIGI M. GNUDTSON, Founder of Knudtson & Associates

### **What Happens If You Exceed the Pet Limit?**

Violating a municipal ordinance on pet limits is a civil infraction, not a criminal offense in most cases. The legal consequences are initiated by local authorities, such as an animal control officer, and typically follow a clear progression.

**Notice of Violation:** An owner is typically first issued a warning or a formal notice to correct the violation, which means rehoming the excess animals within a specified timeframe (e.g., 30 days).

**Civil Fines:** If the owner fails to comply, the municipality can issue fines. These are often escalating, with the penalty for a second violation being higher than the first. For example, in Warren, such a violation is a civil infraction punishable by a fine not to exceed \$500.00.

**Legal Action and Animal Seizure:** In cases of persistent non-compliance or where the number of animals leads to unsanitary conditions, the city may seek a court order to have the animals seized. This often occurs when the situation crosses the line from a simple limit violation into animal neglect or hoarding, as defined by state law.

## Understanding Related Legal Concepts

The line between being a multi-cat household and “animal hoarding” is a legal one, defined not by the number of animals alone, but by the conditions in which they are kept. Michigan’s anti-cruelty statute (MCL 750.50) focuses on the failure to provide adequate care, and a large number of animals can be used as evidence of such failure. Prosecutors can bring felony charges if a sufficient number of animals are found to be living in unsanitary conditions without proper food, water, or veterinary care.

## **Landlord Rules vs. City Ordinances**

It is crucial to recognize that a lease agreement is a legally binding contract. A landlord or homeowners' association (HOA) can impose stricter pet limits than the city ordinance. For example, even if the city of Ann Arbor allows an unlimited number of cats, a lease agreement limiting a tenant to one cat is legally enforceable. Breaking this rule would be a breach of contract, which is grounds for eviction. The local city ordinance provides a legal maximum; it does not grant a right to have pets in violation of a private lease agreement.

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

### **Do kittens count towards the cat limit in Michigan?**

This depends on the specific wording of the local ordinance. Many ordinances, such as those in Detroit and Warren, specify that the limit applies to cats "over the age of four months" or "over the age of six months." This provides a grace period for residents to find homes for a litter of kittens. However, if an ordinance does not specify an age, kittens may be counted towards the total.

### **Are there exceptions for licensed breeders or animal rescues?**

Yes, typically. Most ordinances provide explicit exceptions for state-licensed kennels, veterinary clinics, pet shops, and registered animal protection shelters or rescue organizations. These entities are subject to different regulations and state oversight. For instance, the Warren ordinance explicitly exempts "Licensed kennels, veterinary clinics, animal protection shelters, and pet shops" from its numerical limits.

## **What is the legal recourse if a neighbor has too many cats?**

The appropriate course of action is to file a formal complaint with your local animal control department or the municipal office responsible for code enforcement. This is not a police matter for a 911 call unless there is an immediate danger. The complaint should be based on a suspected violation of a specific local ordinance. Animal control is then responsible for investigating the claim.

## **Can my apartment building set its own pet limit?**

Absolutely. A residential lease is a private contract, and landlords have the right to set pet policies that are more restrictive than local laws, including setting a lower number of allowable pets or prohibiting them entirely. The terms of your signed lease agreement are legally binding and supersede the local ordinance in this context.

**Disclaimer:** This article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or create an attorney-client relationship. The outcome of any legal matter depends on the specific facts and circumstances of the case.



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interests of women and minorities.

