

Date of Hearing: April 28, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Rhodesia Ransom, Chair

AB 478 (Zbur) – As Amended April 21, 2025

SUBJECT: Accessibility to emergency information and services: evacuations: pets

SUMMARY: Requires a city or county, upon the next update to its emergency plan, to designate procedures, and post resources to its website, for the rescue of household pets from areas subject to an evacuation order, as specified, and prohibits household pets rescued from an evacuated area from adoption, euthanasia, or transfer from local animal control custody for 90 days.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Defines evacuation order as an order from the Governor, or a county emergency management official, county sheriff, chief of police, or fire marshal, under which persons subject to the order are required to relocate outside of the geographic area covered by the order due to an imminent danger resulting from a state or local emergency.
- 2) Defines pets as an animal, including a dog, cat, rabbit, rodent, reptile, amphibian, fish, bird, or other species of animal, kept for the purpose of being a household pet.
- 3) Requires a city or county, upon the next update to its emergency plan, to designate procedures for the following entities to safely rescue household pets from areas subject to an evacuation order
 - a. A person with a residence in an area subject to an evacuation order.
 - b. A designated representative of a person with a residence in an area subject to an evacuation order.
 - c. A person or entity with animal rescue experience designated by the city or county.
- 4) Authorizes a city or county to require a person with a residence in an area subject to an evacuation order, or their designated representative, to sign a liability waiver to return to their residence in an evacuation zone.
- 5) Requires a city or county, upon the next update to its emergency plan, to designate persons or entities that individuals, or their designated representatives, can call for assistance in evacuating or retrieving a pet from an area subject to an evacuation order.
- 6) Requires a city or county to post contact information for the persons or entities designated to assist with pets during and after evacuations and resources for persons who need assistance reuniting with pets, including a list of rescued animals, to the city or county's internet website, as specified.
- 7) Prohibits a pet rescued or originating from an area subject to an evacuation order from being adopted, euthanized, or transferred out of the custody of the local animal control agency for at least 90 days.

- 8) Prohibits a pet from being euthanized or transferred out of the custody of the local animal control agency unless all local rescue and foster partners have been notified and given an opportunity to take custody of the pet after the above 90 day period has passed.
- 9) Exempts pets that are irremediably suffering from the adoption, euthanasia, and transfer prohibitions.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) in the Office of the Governor and provides that OES is responsible for the state's emergency and disaster response services for natural, technological, or manmade disasters and emergencies. (Government Code § 8550)
- 2) Requires Cal OES to be responsible for the state's emergency and disaster response services for natural, technological, or man-made disasters and emergencies, including responsibility for activities necessary to prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of emergencies and disasters to people and property. (Government Code § 8550)
- 3) Require all counties plans, and cities with previously adopted emergency plans that designate emergency shelters, to, upon their next update to their emergency plan, designate emergency shelters able to accommodate persons with household pets and requires, to the extent practicable, to designate a cooling center or warming center open to pets when any number of centers are opened. (Government Code § 8593.10)
- 4) Requires Cal OES, in coordination with all interested state agencies with designated response roles in the state emergency plan and interested local emergency management agencies, to jointly establish by regulation a standardized emergency management system for use by all emergency response agencies. (Government Code § 8607)
- 5) Requires Cal OES to approve and adopt, and incorporate the California Animal Response Emergency System (CARES) program developed under the oversight of the Department of Food and Agriculture into the standardized emergency management system. (Government Code § 8608)
- 6) Requires a city or county permitted kennel to create and submit an animal natural disaster evacuation plan, as specified (Government Code § 8608.1)

FISCAL EFFECT: A fiscal committee has not heard this bill.

COMMENTS:

Purpose of the bill: According to the author: "Pets are more than just property—they are family. When disaster strikes, no one should have to choose between their safety and their pet's survival. The FOUND Act ensures that local governments have clear rescue plans in place, so pet owners don't have to risk their lives to save their animals. While we've seen incredible examples of fire and safety officials working alongside the public to reunite pets with their families, as well as the extraordinary efforts of local animal shelters and rescuers, we owe it to pet owners across California to ensure that every city and county has a plan in place before disaster strikes."

Equity Impact: According to the author's staff, "Americans almost unanimously consider their pets a member of the family, but that feeling is strongest amongst lower income demographics. This bill will ensure that all jurisdictions, regardless of the economic status of its residents, have a plan to assist residents in rescuing their pet from an evacuated area."

Background: Animals play an integral role in society. In many homes, pets are considered members of the family. Additionally, working animals provide valuable services to the community, and production livestock contribute millions to the economy.

According to a study from the American Journal of Epidemiology, the risk of evacuation failure in all households was significantly higher in households with an increasing number of dogs or cats. Individuals who do not heed evacuation orders risk injury or death while placing first responders at greater risk. Additionally, when individuals leave pets behind, they are more likely to return before an evacuation order is lifted or develop traumatic responses to abandoning their pets. In September, 2021, the ASPCA released a survey which found that "while more than 90 percent of pet owners plan to bring their pet with them during an evacuation, only 16% have emergency pet-friendly housing secured, and only 46% have a preparedness plan in place." Furthermore, roughly 80% of people who prematurely reenter an evacuation site are attempting to rescue their pets. Proponents of this bill argue that adequately planning for animal evacuation and co sheltering will mitigate threats to evacuees, animals, and first responders.

California is home to nearly 19 million domestic animals. Polls conducted in 2012 estimate that California is home to 6.7 million dogs and 7.1 million cats. Approximately one out of every three households in California owns a dog or a cat. The California Department of Food and Agriculture reported in 2012 that there are over 5.5 million cattle, 570,000 sheep, 141,000 goats, 670,000 horses, just over 100,000 hogs, and millions of chickens in the Golden State.

California Animal Response Emergency System: In 2006, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed AB 450 (Yee), which mandated that the California Animal Response Emergency System (CARES) be incorporated into the State Emergency Plan, and that CDFA and Cal OES enter into a Memorandum of Understanding that would require them to incorporate CARES into all levels of the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS.) The California Emergency Services Act, Section 8608, includes direction on implementation and authorities of the CARES program.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is required by the government code. The original MOU between Cal OES and CDFA was completed in 2007. A new MOU including UC Davis' California Veterinary Emergency Team is under development. In the interim, each party informally outlined their role and are working together. CDFA and Cal OES are also working together to support interagency and volunteer stakeholder engagement for numerous issues that arise relating to animals during disasters.

CARES provides operational guidance to assist with all aspects of animal care and control in the all four phases of a disaster. In the mitigation and preparedness phases, the CARES Unit will assist local government with planning and preparing for animals in disasters. In the response and recovery phases, the CARES system, as one of the core functions of the California Emergency Support Function (ESF) 11, will primarily assist and support the CA-ESF 11 Coordinator in carrying out the responsibilities of the position in response operations. CDFA leads CA-ESF 11 and is supported by other State agencies and stakeholders with similar discipline-specific

responsibilities. CA-ESF 11 is responsible for the management and oversight based on its authorities, resources, and capabilities as outlined in the State Emergency Plan (SEP). In addition, CARES provides resources for the public, for animal businesses, for shelters, and for emergency planners. CARES is structured in accordance with the SEMS and the Incident Command System (ICS).

Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act: In 2006, Congress passed the PETS Act. This act:

- 1) Requires the FEMA Director to ensure that state and local emergency plans address the needs of persons with household pets and service animals before, during, and after an emergency.
- 2) Authorizes the FEMA Director to:
 - a. Study and develop plans accounting for the needs of persons with pets and service animals; and
 - b. Contribute project and program funds to state and local governments for animal emergency preparedness purposes, such as the procurement, construction, leasing, or renovating of emergency shelter facilities to accommodate people, pets, and service animals.
- 3) Authorizes federal agencies, during an emergency, to provide rescue, care, shelter, and essential needs to persons with household pets and service animals.

California Veterinary Emergency Team: The 2021-2022 California Budget, and associated trailer bill, allocated \$3 million per year to the University of California, Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine in order to develop the California Veterinary Emergency Team program. This program must support a network of government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals to assist in the evacuation and care of animals and livestock in all stages of a disaster or emergency. When there is not an active emergency, the program will conduct ongoing research, recruit, train and prepare volunteers, and train veterinarians and veterinary students on best practices in shelter and emergency medicine.

Arguments in Support: The Social Compassion in Legislation writes in support, “During the recent fires in Southern California, jurisdictions lacked a coordinated procedure or central authority to facilitate animal rescues. As a result, volunteers and rescue groups responded to pet owners’ pleas for help, often entering fire zones through unofficial channels. This not only created a distressing situation for both pets and their devoted guardians but also placed an additional burden on first responders and government officials, who must manage frustrated and desperate pet owners and advocates. By directing cities and counties to develop procedures and establish communication hubs for residents needing to rescue their pets during evacuations, AB 478 lays the foundation for a more organized and professional approach to pet rescue. The bill affords local jurisdictions the flexibility to tailor procedures according to their specific needs and capacities, as well as adapt implementation based on the type of emergency. Furthermore, by requiring a dedicated page for found animals, the bill helps ensure that lost pets can be reunited with their families as quickly as possible.”

Prior and Related Legislation:

AB 2232 (Maienschein) Chaptered by Secretary of State - Chapter 14, Statutes of 2024. Added greater clarification to the requirement, upon the next update to a city or county's emergency plan, to designate a warming center open to pets when any number of centers are opened, to the extent practicable.

AB 781 (Maienschein) Chapter 344, Statutes of 2023. Requires all counties plans, and cities with previously adopted emergency plans that designate emergency shelters, to update their emergency plan and designate emergency shelters able to accommodate persons with pets.

AB 1141 (Dahle, 2023) would have renamed the "Livestock Pass" program to the "Agricultural Pass" or "Ag Pass" program and make the Agricultural Pass program applicable to qualified agricultural producers, as specified. (Held in Senate Agriculture per the author)

AB 1648 (Maienschein) Chapter 547, Statutes of 2022. Requires a city or county permitted kennel to create and submit an animal natural disaster evacuation plan.

SB 547 (Glazer, 2020) would have required the University of California, Davis (UCD) School of Veterinary Medicine to develop a program to assist in coordinating and training a network of government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals to care for household and domestic animals and livestock during emergencies. It was held in Assembly Agriculture and incorporated into the budget by AB 132 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 144, Statutes of 2021.

AB 2568 (Maienschein, 2020) was substantively similar to AB 1648 (Maienschein) Chapter 547, Statutes of 2022. and died in the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee. This bill would have required a city or county that requires a kennel license or permit to operate a kennel within its jurisdiction, to require, as a condition for obtaining the kennel license or permit, that the kennel owner create and submit to the city or county an animal natural disaster evacuation plan for any kennel covered by the license or permit.

AB 486 (Limón, 2019) was substantively similar to AB 1648 and held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. This bill would have required a city or county that requires a kennel license or permit to operate a kennel within its jurisdiction, to require, as a condition for obtaining the kennel license or permit, that the kennel owner create and submit to the city or county an animal natural disaster evacuation plan for any kennel covered by the license or permit.

AB 1877 (Limón), Chapter 630, Statutes of 2018. Required OES to create a library of translated emergency notifications and a translation style guide, as specified, and required designated alerting authorities to consider using the library and translation style guide when issuing emergency notifications to the public.

SB 821 (Jackson), Chapter 615, Statutes of 2018. Authorized counties to enter into an agreement to access the contact information of resident accountholders through the records of a public utility, as defined, for the sole purpose of enrolling county residents in a county-operated public emergency warning system.

SB 833 (McGuire), Chapter 617, Statutes of 2018. Required Cal OES, in consultation with specified stakeholders, to develop voluntary guidelines for alerting and warning the public of an emergency, and requires Cal OES to develop an alert and warning training, as specified.

AB 289 (Gray), Chapter 289, Statutes of 2017. Required Cal OES to update the State Emergency Plan on or before January 1, 2019, and every five years thereafter.

AB 2311 (Brown), Chapter 520, Statutes of 2016). Required each county to integrate access and functional needs into its emergency plan upon the next update.

AB 450 (Yee), Chapter 604, Statutes of 2006. Required OES to approve, adopt, and incorporate the CARES program into the SEMS.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Rescuers for Change
Animal Wellness Action
Berkeley Animal Rights Center
Better Together Forever
Born Again Animal Rescue and Adoption
Compassionate Bay
Concerned Citizens Animal Rescue
Feline Lucky Adventures
Giantmecha Syndicate
Greater Los Angeles Animal Spay Neuter Collaborative
Individuals (885)
Latino Alliance for Animal Care Foundation
Leaders for Ethics, Animals, and The Planet (LEAP)
Los Angeles Democrats for The Protection of Animals
Michelson Center for Public Policy
NY 4 Whales
Pet Advocacy Network
Pibbles N Kibbles Animal Rescue
Plant-based Advocates
Project Minnie
Real Good Rescue
Seeds 4 Change Now Animal Rescue
Seniors Citizens for Humane Education and Legislation
Social Compassion in Legislation (Sponsor)
Start Rescue
Students Against Animal Cruelty Club - Hueneme High School
The Animal Rescue Mission
The Canine Condition
The Pet Loss Support Group
The Spayce Project

Underdog Heroes, INC.
Women United for Animal Welfare (WUFAW)
World Animal Protection

Opposition

None on file.

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