



Memorandum in Support

COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW

Animals #10

March 30, 2025

S. 673

By: Senator Martinez

A.1693

By: M. of A. Rosenthal

Senate Committee: Social Services

Assembly Committee: Social Services

Effective Date: One hundred eighty days
after enactment

AN ACT to amend the social services law, in relation to establishing the housing people and animals together grant program.

LAW & SECTION REFERRED TO: Social Services Law, New Section §45-aa and 459-bb.

THE COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW **SUPPORTS THIS LEGISLATION**

This bill amends the Social Services Law by adding two new sections, 45-aa and 459-bb,¹ each of which establishes a new grant program entitled “Housing People and Animals Together” to address and support the co-sheltering² needs of two groups of individuals with companion animals who have historically faced difficulties in securing sheltered housing: those who are experiencing homelessness and those who are victims of domestic violence.

New §45-aa, Subsection 2 would provide for the establishment of a co-sheltering grant program for people experiencing homelessness with companion animals, and is designed to be implemented by the office of children and family services and the office of temporary and disability assistance. The program would provide funding to non-profit organizations and municipal shelters that provide housing to people experiencing homelessness to help shelters lower barriers to housing people with their companion animals. The funding used to support the program would be subject to appropriation. Subsection 3 of new §45-aa sets forth criteria and goals for fund distribution, which include (a) the provision of veterinary services to provide essential medical care to animals housed onsite; (b) facility renovation to incorporate a kennel or other needed infrastructural changes to safely house people experiencing homelessness with companion animals; (c) training

¹ Specifically, new §45-aa is added to Article 2-A (Shelter and Supported Housing Programs), Title 2 (Single Room Occupancy Support Services Program) and new §459-bb is added to Article 6-A of the Domestic Violence Protection Act.

² The new sections each define “co-sheltering” as “housing accommodations that enable the co-existence of people and their companion animals in a shelter setting.”

of staff and technical assistance related to applicable health and hygiene protocols and best practices; and (d) the provision of food, supplies, and equipment to accommodate animals in the shelter. Subsection 4 lists certain experts who are to be consulted in evaluating the implementation of these goals.

Similarly, §459-bb provides for the establishment of an identical co-sheltering grant program for victims of domestic violence with companion animals “to aid in expanding access to sheltered housing for victims of domestic violence with companion animals.”

It is widely recognized that victims of domestic violence will remain in harm’s way to protect their pets.³ The importance of pets/companion animals to the two thirds of households in the United States and changed attitudes towards pets helped prompt the American Bar Association to adopt Resolution 504 (the “Resolution”).⁴ The Resolution states, in part, one of its goals is to “increase access to justice for all persons by....[r]emoving barriers to victims seeking safety for themselves and their pets through promoting greater emergency and transitional shelter and housing options. . . .”⁵ The Resolution urges governmental support for protecting pets and victims of domestic and other violence through the inclusion of pets in civil protection orders, the consideration of pets in domestic relations proceedings, *as well as through the provision of increased access to temporary shelters/housing for people with pets* (emphasis added).⁶ Indeed, the bill sponsors’ justification cites to research showing that, not only have 71% of women in domestic violence shelters reported their abuser threatening to injure or have their companion animal killed, but that *nearly half of victims choose to remain in an abusive environment in fear of leaving their animal behind.*⁷

The ABA Report in Support of Resolution 504 (the “ABA Report”) notes that co-sheltering options for victims with pets should be prioritized where feasible, because protecting the human-animal bond is essential to preventing further emotional harm to both victims and their pets.⁸

³ See ABA Resolution 504 (2025) <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/directories/policy/midyear-2025/504-midyear-2025.pdf>.) unanimously adopted by the ABA House of Delegates on February 3, 2025 (See <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2025/mym-hod-res/504.pdf> (last visited Mar. 7, 2025)). See also *Animals in Social Work: Why and How They Matter* (The Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series) pub. October 29, 2014 by T. Ryan (Editor), https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137372291_14 at Chapter 14, “Domestic Violence and Companion Animal Welfare” by Deborah-Anne Walsh, Professor, University of Queensland, Australia (last visited March 12, 2025).

⁴ American Bar Association Resolution 504, <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2025/mym-hod-res/504.pdf> Page 1 (last visited Mar. 9, 2025).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See ABA Report, <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/directories/policy/midyear-2025/504-midyear-2025.pdf> *supra*, at Sec. IV (C)(1): Expanding Shelter And Housing Options For Victims With Pets, Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims as Well as Their Pets.

⁸ See ABA Report, *supra* at IV(C)(1) “Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims as Well as Their Pets.”

This bill also provides funding to enable co-sheltering of individuals experiencing homelessness with their pets. The ASPCA supports co-sheltering.⁹ Its website notes 2017 and 2019 studies where it was estimated that 12% of unsheltered homeless adults owned pets and 48% of unhoused pet-owning individuals reported being turned away from a shelter because of no-pet policies.¹⁰ Similarly, the National Alliance to End Homelessness¹¹ conducted a survey to assess why individuals experiencing homelessness avoid shelters, and 22% of respondents indicated they avoided shelter because their pet was not allowed to be with them. In a [study](#) of 66 people with pets who were experiencing homelessness, 93% of men and 96% of women stated housing would not be acceptable if pets were not allowed.¹² The report noted that a majority had been refused housing because they had pets and that, due to these challenges, many people choose to live in their cars or outside rather than separate from their beloved pets by surrendering them to an animal shelter that may euthanize them.

In 2023, the federally-funded PAWS Act¹³ directed the Department of Agriculture to award grants to programs that provide emergency and transitional shelter and housing for domestic violence victims with pets in the community. It should be noted that the risk of federal spending restriction underscores the urgent need for New York State to enact legislation to protect people experiencing domestic violence and homelessness and to help ensure they are able to begin to rebuild their lives without giving up the stability and emotional support that a pet provides.

The positive effects of pets on humans are well-documented and in particular the healing effect. Since 2008, the National Institute of Health (NIH) has conducted public-private research entitled "Processes in Social & Affective Development: Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) Research" resulting in workshops, journals, and articles to study the interaction between humans, particularly children, and animals.¹⁴

“Pets are part of the family...unhoused families need access to safe and affordable temporary and permanent housing...[and] *[b]eing able to take their pet with them is critical in rebuilding their lives.*” states Nathaniel Fields, CEO of Urban Resource Initiatives ("URI") (emphasis added).¹⁵ Since its inception in 2013, URI's People and Animals Living Safely ("PALS") program, which partners with NYC's Human Resource Administration, has expanded to 11 shelters serving 600 families and 800 pets. Also in New York City, Emergency Shelter Network ("ESN") received a

⁹ <https://www.aspc.org/improving-laws-animals/public-policy/housing/people-pets-experiencing-homelessness> (last visited Mar. 7, 2025).

¹⁰ Same as fn10

¹¹ <https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Keeping-People-and-Pets-Together-031220.pdf> (last visited Mar. 7, 2025).

¹² <https://www.mydogismyhome.org/faqs#:~:text=Co%2Dsheltering%20is%20defined%20by,boarding%20or%20foster%20care%20arrangements.>

¹³ <https://habri.org/pressroom/20230314> (last visited Mar. 7, 2025).

¹⁴ <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/about/org/der/branches/cdbb/programs/psad/HAI> (last visited Mar. 17, 2025).

¹⁵ CITE for Fields's statement

PetSmart Charities grant to support pet co-sheltering in NYC homeless shelters¹⁶ by co-sponsoring free street pet clinics to support pet owners looking for shelter, deliver “Lunch & Learn” webinars featuring stories of successful pet co-sheltering models, and support faith-based emergency shelter partners to host guests and their animal companions. In 2019, California allocated \$16 million in small grants to nonprofit shelter operators to modify their facilities and make them pet-inclusive through its Pet Assistance and Support (“PAS”) Program, administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development.¹⁷ “[B]y making accommodations for pets, we bring individuals into shelters who otherwise would not receive services and shelter.”¹⁸

This proposed legislation would also help reduce the homeless pet population and the stress on the already overburdened state shelter and rescue system, which in many if not most areas is at maximum capacity. If people experiencing homelessness and survivors of domestic violence were not compelled to surrender their pets to animal shelters, these organizations’ limited capacity to accept pets would be available to handle unwanted, abandoned or willingly surrendered pets. In addition, in accordance with [data](#) collected between 2019 and 2023,¹⁹ pets given up by owners experiencing homelessness or domestic violence may be less adoptable, as they—like their human companions—often exhibit the behavioral effects related to abuse-related stress. Heartbreakingly, this data shows that animals relinquished by unhoused owners were most at risk for euthanasia or other shelter death. Co-sheltering provides a humane solution to mitigate this risk.

The Committee on Animals and the Law commends the sponsors for proposing legislation that will enable victims of domestic violence and homelessness, already in vulnerable economic and emotional circumstances, to remain with their beloved companion animals. Concurrently, this laudable legislation will permit more animals to remain with the people they know and trust and remain out of the overburdened pet shelter system, where they are at great risk of remaining unadopted and may ultimately face euthanasia.

For the foregoing reasons, NYSBA’s Committee on Animals and the Law **SUPPORTS** the passage and enactment of this legislation.

¹⁶ See <https://emergencyshelternetwork.org/emerging-programs/co-shelters/#> (last visited March 12, 2025), which collaborates with a wide range of partners, including Positive Tails, My Dog is My Home, NYC Mayor’s Office of Animal Welfare, and others.

¹⁷ See “A Practice Based Exploration of Advocating for Pet Inclusive Housing Amidst Climate-Induced Migration,” pub. June 17, 2024, <https://www.mydogismyhome.org/publications>, which stated: “California has allocated \$16 million in small grants to nonprofit shelter operators across three grant cycles to modify their facilities and make them pet-inclusive. The demand for these grants has been notably high, with the first two cycles being oversubscribed at a rate of two to one, indicating significant interest and necessity for such pet accommodations”.

¹⁸ See California Department of Housing and Community Support, Pet Assistance and Support (PAS) Program, <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-and-funding/programs-active/pet-assistance-and-support-program> (last visited Mar. 9, 2025).

¹⁹ See Frontiers in Veterinary Science at <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/veterinary-science/articles/10.3389/fvets.2024.1430388/full> (last visited Mar. 12, 2025).