



Memorandum in Support

COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW

Animals #29

March 30, 2026

S. 896-A
A. 6388-A

By: Senator Martinez
By: M. of A. Hyndman
Senate Committee: Passed
Assembly Committee: Governmental
Operations
Effective Date: 90th day after it shall have
become a law

AN ACT to amend the executive law, in relation to the establishment of local comprehensive emergency management plans

LAW AND SECTION REFERRED TO: Subdivisions 5 and 7 of Section 23 of the Executive Law.

THE COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW
SUPPORTS THIS LEGISLATION

Hurricane Katrina remains one of the most catastrophic and devastating disasters in United States history. Along with the tragic loss of human life, hundreds of thousands of animals died as well.¹ Throughout the city and surrounding area lay deceased dogs, cats, horses and other domesticated animals; some were found still chained to their dog houses with no chance of survival. Hundreds of houses were marked with spray paint identifying houses where animals were found dead inside, some still in the crates their owners put them in to keep them safe to travel, only to be left behind; others were locked in their houses, having failed to eat their way through the doors that kept them from escape, all drowned inside their homes when their owners left and the water level rose. Farm animals failed to escape this terrible fate as well. Thousands were found dead, having drowned in their cages or pens. The animals lucky enough to escape the initial flooding roamed the wreckage, and eventually many finally succumbed to dehydration and starvation.

This massive toll of companion, farm and other animal death could have been prevented if a disaster plan which included accommodations for animals had been in place, as well as a plan for centralized communication and cooperation among related governmental agencies and local municipal and private shelters and rescues, letting residents know where they could shelter with their animals.

¹ Cong. Research Serv., Hurricane Katrina: Social-Demographic Characteristics of Impacted Areas (2005).

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Today, more than ever, millions of American households include companion animals, and many people consider their pets to be an integral part of their families.² One of the most widely reported issues during the catastrophic events of Hurricane Katrina involved the failure to provide care for companion animals during evacuation and sheltering operations. Evacuation shelters prohibited pets, and many individuals were forced to surrender their animals before boarding evacuation transportation, forcing residents to make difficult choices between their safety and the welfare of their animals.³ Research conducted after the disaster indicated that a substantial portion of people who remained in evacuation zones did so because they could not bring their pets with them to safe accommodations.⁴ It is clear that the absence of pet friendly evacuation options significantly undermined compliance with evacuation orders, and as a result, people remained in dangerous conditions rather than abandon their pets.

The failure to provide for animals during Katrina generated widespread public outrage.⁵ The disaster became a catalyst for reform in emergency management policy, leading to the passage of the federal Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act or “PETS” Act of 2006, which requires state and local governments to incorporate pets and service animals into disaster planning in order to qualify for federal disaster assistance.⁶ It also authorizes federal agencies, such as FEMA, to assist in animal rescue, evacuation, and sheltering operations during disasters.⁷ The PETS Act, however, does not mandate how states or counties are to achieve a successful evacuation of people with companion animals or people with disabilities who have service animals. Some states have also taken action to incorporate emergency preparedness laws for animals into their state laws, including California which passed its Disaster Preparedness and Sheltering Law in 2023. The law requires local governments to designate pet-friendly emergency shelters for use during natural disasters and extreme weather events.⁸

The proposed S.896-A /A.6388-A represents a continuation of reforms in emergency planning by requiring that county emergency management plans include provisions addressing accommodations for companion animals during emergencies, including planning considerations related to temporary housing and evacuation sites.⁹

By requiring counties to develop partnerships with local and municipal animal shelters, societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, county animal response teams, and veterinary services, counties are better able to assist in responding to emergencies involving animals, to identify temporary housing or other facilities that will be designated as animal friendly, and

² Am. Veterinary Med. Ass’n, U.S. Pet Ownership Statistics (2022).

³ Sebastian Heath & Sara Linnabary, Challenges of Managing Animals in Disasters, 21 J. Applied Animal Welfare Sci. 17 (2008).

⁴ Rebecca J. Huss, Valuing Man’s and Woman’s Best Friend: The Moral and Legal Status of Companion Animals, 86 Marq. L. Rev. 47, 78 (2002).

⁵ Rebecca J. Huss, *ibid.*

⁶ Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-308, 120 Stat. 1725 (2006).

⁷ Animal Legal & Historical Center, State and Federal Disaster Planning Laws and Pets.

⁸ CA - Disaster - § 8608. California Animal Response Emergency System (CARES) program; | Animal Legal & Historical Center

⁹ S.896-A, 2025–2026 Leg., Reg. Sess. (N.Y. 2025).

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better able to cultivate and allocate local resources and mobilize their local volunteer base. As a result, both human safety and animal welfare are advanced.¹⁰

We cannot go back in time, but we can learn from the mistakes made in past disasters and evacuations to ensure that New York is prepared to accommodate all people and all animals who need to be evacuated when a disaster strikes. The proposed bill, S.896-A /A.6388-A, recognizes the power and importance of the human-animal bond,¹¹ and recognizes that the safety of people is directly connected to the safety of their companion animals.

The bill further requires that emergency communication planning and procedures take into account accommodation needs of people who will need to be evacuated in any disaster, including residents with vision or hearing impairments, to ensure their access to critical emergency information.¹² Accommodating this segment of the population in emergency planning is needed as well, and is an important part of the bill.

For all these reasons, the Committee on Animals and the Law supports the passage and enactment of this legislation.

¹⁰ James G. Hodge, Public Health Law and Emergency Preparedness, 46 *Jurimetrics J.* 145 (2006).

¹¹ James G. Hodge, *ibid.*

¹² A.6388-A, 2025–2026 Leg., Reg. Sess. (N.Y. 2025).

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