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Memorandum in Support

COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW

Animals #38

June 3, 2026

S. 7612
A. 8375

By: Senator Martinez
By: M. of A. Rosenthal
Senate Committee: Passed Senate
Assembly Committee: Passed Assembly
Effective Date: 120 days after enactment

AN ACT to amend the social services law, in relation to establishing a statewide co-shelter toolkit

LAW AND SECTION REFERRED TO: Social Services Law, new Section 459-bb

THE COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW SUPPORTS THIS LEGISLATION

This bill amends the Social Services Law by adding a new section, 459-bb, enabling the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, in collaboration with the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, to provide a comprehensive toolkit of best practices, resources and case studies for housing providers, municipalities and organizations attempting to establish co-sheltering facilities for domestic violence victims and other homeless individuals and their companion animals.

The bill adopts a holistic and practical approach to the challenge of keeping owners and their beloved pets together, as studies show that co-sheltering with a pet affords these individuals much needed stability and support.[1] The toolkit will contain incident reports; resources to partner with veterinarians, animal welfare organizations, housing providers and law enforcement; data collection on such issues as outreach and interim and permanent housing; worker training; case studies on established programs; and sources of funding. The Commissioner of Temporary and Disability Assistance services must obtain evidence-based recommendations from housing providers, non-profit organizations, and veterinarians, which will be disseminated via a website, social media, newsletters, and outreach.

Other states, such as Louisiana, have successfully implemented the co-sheltering toolkit.[2] Components include designating lead agencies to assist with evacuation, transportation and

[1] See, e.g., "Cohabited Sheltering: A Template for the Nation – Sheltering humans and animals together during a disaster," https://friends4life.org/DisasterToolkit/ at pp. 12/19 and 13/19; "Cohousing as a Solution," https://www.aspca.org/improving-laws-animals/public-policy/housing/cohousing-solution (last viewed 2/8/26).
[2] See, e.g., "Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Emergency Response Actions: Cohabited Human/Household Pet Sheltering Toolkit (Version 19; revised July 2023).

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sheltering,[3] and devising shelter coordination checklists for emergency management, animal control, law enforcement, the fire department, veterinarians, community agencies, alternate pet shelter sites,[4] identifying and registering people with pets, separating pets by species, establishing pet rules, defining which pet species can cohabit with their owners, establishing separate areas for pets unsuitable for cohabitation and designating secure pet exercise/relief areas.[5] Included are links to the USDA, CDC, FEMA, Red Cross and VOAD, shelter forms and information on public health and safety, service animals, volunteer registration, bite protocol and a shelter manual,[6] teams of volunteers and technical experts, and checklists for all phases of the sheltering process, from initial response to alternate sheltering.[7] Care is made to ensure that pet owners are responsible for the care of their pets and are aware of the rules concerning pets at the shelter.[8]

The human-animal bond, a "mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals … influenced by behaviors considered essential to the health and well-being of both,"[9] is stronger for people experiencing homelessness, because pets provide them with the comfort and stability that is otherwise lacking in their lives.[10] The option to co-shelter with a pet may mean the difference between life or death, as the loss of the beloved pet may be viewed as a worse outcome than remaining in an unsafe situation.[11] [12] Shelters allowing pets to reside with their owners save lives as they remove a significant barrier to ensuring safe and stable housing for domestic violence victims and the chronically homeless.[13] Successful co-sheltering models around the country have retrofitted homeless and domestic violence shelters with low cost fixtures and equipment to accommodate pets in shelters; partnering with animal welfare organizations provides expert support in animal behavior, co-shelter design and veterinary services.[14]

Shelter management toolkits afford access information in a central depository and are consistent with the approach to disaster management that is being taken in many jurisdictions.[15]

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[3] *Id*. at p. 7.
[4] *Id*. at p. 9.
[5] *Id.* at p. 10.
[6] *Id*.
[7] *Id*. at pp. 11-13.
[8] *Id*. at p. 15.
[9] My Dog is My Home, "Housing People and Their Animals Together," from New York Continuum of Care September 2025 Public Meeting, p. 10.
[10] *Id*. at p. 12.
[11] Cohousing as a Solution," p. 1/6, https://www.aspca.org/improving-law-animals/public-policy/housing/cohousing-solution (last viewed 2/8/26).
[12] *Id*. at pp. 1/6 and 2/6.
[13] *Id*. at p. 2/6.
[14] See, e.g., case study from California's Pet Assistance and Support Program, which from a "relatively modest investment" allowed facilities to do the necessary retrofitting, provided behavioral support, food, equipment and short-term pet sitting and saved lives for those experiencing emergency housing needs.
[15] See, "Shelter Management Toolkit," https://www.training-source.org/book/export/html/452329 (last viewed 2/8/26); Information accessed through the toolkit could include online courses, such as SUNYA's "Dealing with Animals in Emergencies," developed in partnership with David Chico, VMD, a veterinarian with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and presented by Kelly Nilsson, Former Director of Disaster Response Services for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA).

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The Committee on Animals and the Law commends the sponsors for proposing practical legislation to enable the successful implementation of New York's co-sheltering program. The co-sheltering program is essential to protect three of society's most vulnerable populations - the homeless, who might otherwise remain on the street; victims of domestic violence, who could remain in abusive situations; and animals, which might otherwise face abandonment, neglect, starvation, and even death.

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

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