
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 478
Author: Zbur (D), et al.
Amended: 8/29/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE GOVERNMENTAL ORG. COMMITTEE: 14-0, 7/8/25
AYES: Padilla, Valladares, Archuleta, Ashby, Blakespear, Cervantes, Dahle,
Hurtado, Jones, Ochoa Bogh, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Wahab
NO VOTE RECORDED: Weber Pierson

SENATE BUS., PROF. & ECON. DEV. COMMITTEE: 11-0, 7/14/25
AYES: Ashby, Choi, Archuleta, Arreguín, Grayson, Menjivar, Niello,
Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg, Weber Pierson

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25
AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

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

SOURCE: Social Compassion in Legislation

DIGEST: This bill requires a city or county, upon the next update to its emergency plan, to designate procedures, subject to approval by the incident commander or emergency management authority, and post resources to its website, regarding the rescue of household pets from areas subject to an evacuation order, as specified. Additionally, the bill prohibits household pets rescued from an evacuated area from being adopted, euthanized, or transferred from local animal control custody for 30 days, except as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Provides, pursuant to the California Emergency Services Act (ESA), that political subdivisions have full power during a local emergency to provide mutual aid to any affected area in accordance with local ordinances, resolutions, emergency plans, or agreements.
- 2) Requires counties to send a copy of their emergency plan to the Office of Emergency Services (OES) upon an update to the plan.
- 3) Requires a city or county to post on its internet website information for pet emergency preparedness, including, but not limited to, information for creating an evacuation plan and emergency checklist for pets consistent with recommendations publicly published by the Department of Food and Agriculture (DFA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- 4) Defines “emergency plan” for these purposes to mean official and approved documents that describe the principles and methods to be applied in carrying out emergency operations or rendering mutual aid during emergencies.
- 5) Authorizes the Governor, during a state of emergency, to suspend any regulatory statute, or statute prescribing the procedure for conduct of state business, or the orders, rules, or regulations of any state agency where the Governor determines and declares that strict compliance with any statute, order, rule, or regulation would in any way prevent, hinder, or delay the mitigation of the effects of the emergency.

This bill:

- 1) Requires a city or county, upon the next update to its emergency plan, to designate procedures for the rescue a pet from an area subject to an evacuation order, subject to approval by the incident commander or emergency management authority, that at the time of the evacuation the pet’s owner believed to be alive.
- 2) Requires the procedures to establish timelines or conditions in which rescues can occur as safely as possible.

- 3) 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 releasing the city or county from any liabilities or claims related to the person's return to the residence in accordance with the procedures described above.
- 4) Provides that nothing in this bill shall be construed to grant any person the absolute right to reenter an evacuation zone. All reentry shall be subject to incident conditions and approval by the designated incident commander or emergency management authority.
- 5) Requires a city or county to update its emergency plan to designate a person or entity for a person with a residence in an area subject to an evacuation order or their designated representative to call if the person is in need of information regarding evacuating pets during an evacuation.
- 6) Requires a city or county to post on its internet website information, including, but not limited to: contact information for the person or entity designated to provide information regarding evacuating pets during an evacuation, as specified; and resources for persons who need assistance reuniting with pets rescued from areas subject to evacuation orders, including a list of animals rescued from the evacuated areas that is lined on the home page of the city's or county's internet website.
- 7) Prohibits a pet rescued or originating from an area subject to an evacuation order, that would otherwise be eligible for adoption, from being made available for adoption, euthanized, or transferred out of the custody of the local animal control agency or its in-state partner animal shelters, animal rescues, or animal fosters for at least 30 days.
- 8) Authorizes a local animal control agency to transfer a pet to an in-state partner animal shelter, animal rescue, or animal foster during the 30-day period if the local animal control agency maintains records of the location of the pet in order to facilitate owner reunification.
- 9) Provides that, after the 30-day period has passed, a pet shall not be euthanized if an animal rescue organization has previously notified the local animal control agency of their willingness to take custody of the pet and completes that transfer upon the conclusion of the 30-day period.

- 10) Provides that the above prohibitions do not apply to a pet that is irremediably suffering, or a pet that was relinquished or surrendered by its owner.
- 11) Defines “evacuation order” to mean 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 be relocated outside of the geographic area covered by the order due to an imminent danger resulting from a declared federal or state emergency.
- 12) Defines “pet” to mean 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.
- 13) Includes related legislative findings and declarations.

Background

Author Statement. According to the author’s office, “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.”

The Life of Pets. A study published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* found that the risk of evacuation failure increases with the number of dogs or cats in a household. When residents delay or ignore evacuation orders, often out of concern for their pets, they not only put themselves at greater risk, but also increase danger for first responders. Leaving animals behind can lead to significant emotional distress and often drives people to reenter evacuation zones before it is safe to do so. According to a September 2021 survey by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), while over 90% of pet owners say they intend to evacuate with their animals, only 46% have a plan, and just 16% have secured pet-friendly shelter options. Notably, about 80% of individuals who return prematurely to evacuation zones do so to rescue pets. Supporters of this bill contend that proactive planning for animal evacuation and co-sheltering can reduce risks for people, animals, and first responders alike.

While it is difficult to know exactly how many pets reside in California, multiple surveys have been completed attempting to get a better grasp on the universe of households with pets. According to the DFA's "[Pet Ownership Calculator](#)," formulas for estimating the number of pet-owning households using national percentages results in approximately 57% of all households owning at least one pet; of which, 38% own at least one dog and 25% own at least one cat. Approximately three percent of households include a pet bird.

This bill defines "pet" to mean 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.

California Animal Response Emergency System. In 2006, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed AB 450 (Yee, Chapter 604, Statutes of 2006), which mandated that the California Animal Response Emergency System (CARES) be incorporated into the State Emergency Plan, and that DFA and 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 ESA, 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 OES and DFA was completed in 2007. A new MOU including the University of California (UC) Davis' California Veterinary Emergency Team is under development. In the interim, each party informally outlined their role and are working together. DFA and 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. DFA 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. 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.

Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act. In 2006, Congress passed the PETS Act. The act 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. Additionally, the act authorizes the Director to study and develop plans accounting for the needs of persons with pets and service animals and to contribute project and program funds to state and local governments for animal emergency preparedness purposes, as specified. The act also authorized federal agencies, during an emergency, to provide rescue, care, shelter, and essential needs to persons with household pets and service animals.

Prior/Related Legislation

AB 781 (Maienschein, Chapter 344, Statutes of 2023) requires, among other things, upon the next update to a city or county's emergency plan, or whenever a city or county designates any number of emergency shelters, that emergency plan be updated to designate emergency shelters able to accommodate persons with pets, as specified.

AB 1648 (Maienschein, Chapter 547, Statutes of 2022) requires any city or county to require, as a condition for obtaining a kennel license or permit, that the kennel owner create and submit to the city or county an animal natural disaster evacuation plan, as specified.

AB 1103 (Dahle, Chapter 609, Statutes of 2021) established a county livestock pass program (Livestock Pass) for the purpose of granting access to a Livestock Pass-holder's ranch property during or following a natural disaster, and required the State Fire Marshal to develop a curriculum for Livestock Pass.

AB 450 (Yee, Chapter 604, Statutes of 2006) required OES to approve, adopt, and incorporate the "California Animal Response Emergency System" (CARES) program into the standardized emergency management system.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, OES reports annual ongoing General Fund cost pressures of approximately \$668,000 and three Emergency

Services Coordinators to support each OES administrative response region (Inland, Coastal, and Southern). OES notes that regional staff are already responsible for coordinating animal-related resources; however, this bill will expand those duties. OES will need to deploy additional personnel to support animal needs and resource requests.

Unknown, potentially significant reimbursable mandate costs (General Fund). To the extent the Commission on State Mandates determines that any of these provisions create a new program or impose a higher level of service on local agencies, local agencies could claim reimbursement of those costs.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/29/25)

Social Compassion in Legislation (Source)

American Kennel Club, INC.

Angel's Furry Friends Rescue

Animal Legal Defense Fund

Animal Rescuers for Change

Animal Wellness Action

Berkeley Animal Rights Center

Better Together Forever

Born Again Animal Rescue and Adoption

California Animal Welfare Association

City of Agoura Hills

City of Hidden Hills

City of Laguna Beach

Compassionate Bay

Concerned Citizens Animal Rescue

Feline Lucky Adventures

Fix Our Shelters

Giantmecha Syndicate

Greater Los Angeles Animal Spay Neuter Collaborative

Hugs and Kisses Animal Fund

Individuals (885)

Laguna Beach; City of

Latino Alliance for Animal Care Coalition

Latino Alliance for Animal Care Foundation

Leaders for Ethics, Animals, and the Planet (LEAP)

Los Angeles County Democrats for the Protection of Animals

Los Angeles Democrats for the Protection of Animals

Michelson Center for Public Policy

NorCal Bully Breed Rescue
 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
 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
 693 Individuals

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/29/25)

Riverside County Sheriff's Office

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: In support of the bill, Social Compassion in Legislation writes that, “AB 478 aims to ensure that cities and counties have procedures in place to help residents in evacuated areas rescue their beloved pets and to provide contact information for residents who need assistance evacuating with or rescuing a pet. Additionally, this bill requires cities and counties to maintain resources for reuniting residents with pets found in evacuated areas, including a designated list of found animals on their websites.”

Further, “[a]s climate change continues to exacerbate natural disasters in California – particularly wildfires – cities and counties must plan for as many contingencies as possible, and unfortunately, on an increasingly frequent basis. During evacuations, many animals are left behind for various reasons, including owners not being home when evacuation orders are issued, lack of equipment needed to evacuate their animals, or difficulty capturing the animal at the time of the required departure.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: In opposition to this bill, the Riverside County Sheriff's Office writes that, “AB 478 would require every city and county

to create and implement complex new procedures allowing specific individuals to enter restricted evacuation zones to retrieve pets, to include pet rodents and fish. Our experience developing Riverside County's Agricultural Pass Program under [AB 1103] (2021) demonstrates the true fiscal impact of such mandates. That program alone took over a year to develop, cost the county in excess of \$150,000, and consumed hundreds of personnel hours from sworn deputies, emergency management staff, the Agricultural Commissioner's Office, IT personnel, and legal counsel. Ongoing annual reviews required by [AB 1103] continue to drain resources."

Further, for "Riverside County specifically, this bill multiplies our burden: not only must we create procedures for our vast unincorporated regions, but we must also help develop separate protocols for each of our 17 contract cities. This will require extensive dedication of sworn personnel and support staff in every jurisdiction – a logistical and financial impossibility without additional resources. Riverside County's public safety budget has no surplus to absorb these duplicative mandates, and we have no reason to believe the state will reimburse us."

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0, 6/2/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Bennett

Prepared by: Brian Duke / G.O. / (916) 651-1530
9/2/25 17:59:50

**** END ****