



**Best Friends
Animal Society**
SAVE THEM ALL™



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

December 5, 2022

Dear Assemblymembers and Senators,

Happy Holidays! We look forward to working with you and your staff in the coming year. As animal welfare advocates representing the interests of local governments, animal shelters and animal control agencies, rescue groups, and the interested public, we've come together to provide you with an introduction and update on the state of animal welfare in California.

California leads the nation with the strongest animal protection laws, and we each are proud to be long-time professional animal advocates. We are not just advocates for animals, but also for their human counterparts, and believe firmly in the power of the human-animal bond as a driving positive force. It is critically important that legislative proposals relating to pets consider the implications and impact on vulnerable or low-income pet owners and people who are struggling to keep their pets in their family.

As you may know, California companion animal issues mirror the challenges and concerns of our residents. Housing and financial insecurity, and lack of access to affordable veterinary care, continue to be primary reasons for California citizens giving up their beloved animals, negatively impacting families, and leading to overburdened California shelters.

While the legislature has done a commendable job in passing laws aimed at addressing the housing deficiency across the state, there remains a considerable shortage of affordable housing. Thus, homeownership is out of reach for low- and middle-income earners. The rental market is also limited, very expensive for all, and Californians who own pets face even greater challenges securing a roof over their heads. No-pet rules, prohibitions on animal size, breed limitations and highly restrictive housing insurance requirements, place many Californians in a desperate situation of choosing between obtaining affordable housing, and keeping their beloved companion animals. In addition, insurance companies are using the same animal restrictions to eliminate coverage, not based on individual dogs' past behavior, but general assumptions based on perceived breed and size.

Further, in a time when inflation is making it harder for families to make ends meet, California is suffering a significant and worsening shortage of veterinarians, especially those who can offer reasonably priced services and those who are available to work in animal shelters. Shelters are becoming backlogged with unaltered animals (who cannot be adopted out under California law), and

families are surrendering their pets hoping shelters can provide them the veterinary care that the families cannot access or afford.

This is especially gut-wrenching when so many Californians rely on their pets in so many ways, every day, and the scientific evidence of the value of pet ownership is overwhelming. To be forced to surrender those vital sources of support because they can't find housing, or find or afford veterinary care, is impacting the mental health of a large number of California voters.

Shelters throughout the state are seeing more animals entering the shelter than leaving – and entering because people are forced to surrender, or cannot afford to care for those animals they love. Local funding is being cut, placing greater challenges on many shelters' abilities to provide care and programs that their communities expect and need. Ideally, shelter space would be reserved for those animals in the greatest need, whether medical or behavioral, and not animals with loving owners who are unable to keep them. Collectively, with sound legislative resources and collaboration, we can support Californians and their pets.

We see many animal-related bills introduced each year that have noble intent, but may not carefully consider the interests of the humans and animals who have the greatest need. With many shelters in California now reaching crisis capacity levels, we hope you'll join us and work to find solutions to these most pressing needs – funding, access to veterinary care, and housing. We welcome an opportunity to meet with you or a member of your staff if you wish to further discuss California's animal welfare priorities. Or, please don't hesitate to reach out to any of us at our contact information below.

Sincerely,

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