



NYSAPF is the voice of New York's humane societies, SPCAs, non-profit and municipal animal shelters as well as animal welfare organizations which focus on homeless animals.

**TESTIMONY TO THE NYS ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
SFY 2017-18 STATE BUDGET and LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

Presented by Libby Post, Executive Director of the NYS Animal Protection Federation

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to you today on behalf of the New York State Animal Protection Federation (NYSAPF). The Federation represents all the humane societies and SPCAs as well as non-profit and municipal animal shelters across the state. From a policy perspective, our focus is two-fold—on the organizational strength and financial sustainability of our memberships and on the health and well-being of companion animals—mainly dogs, cats, puppies and kittens but also other domesticated animals such as birds. Our members also include animal welfare organizations such as the ASPCA, the Humane Society of the United States, Feral Cat Focus on Western New York and the Animal Alliance of Greater Syracuse.

We were heartened last session by the passage of A.8261A/S.98A, the Research Animal Retirement Act—also known as the Beagle Freedom Bill. The bill, which was signed by Governor Cuomo this summer, will finally allow cats and dogs used by state-funded research facilities to be offered for adoption either through private placement or at one of New York's animal shelters. The law enables animal shelters to enter into agreements with the research facilities to help expedite the process and protect all involved.

New York State once again led the way. We are just the fifth state in the nation to require that companion animals in state-funded research labs – deemed by the research institution as no longer necessary for scientific research and determined by a veterinarian to be medically suitable for adoption - have the opportunity to live the rest of their lives in a loving and caring home.

Companion Animal Capital Fund

Our focus for the SFY 2017-18 state budget will be the inclusion of \$5 million for a **Companion Animal Capital Fund**. This fund would begin to answer the overwhelming need to assist the state's humane societies, SPCAs and municipal animal shelters maintain and improve their infrastructure through capital projects. Last year, numerous members of the Assembly, including the chair of this committee, Assemblyman Bill Magee, and the state senate signed on to support the Fund.

While we are currently surveying the state's shelters for the latest information, I can tell you that last year the capital needs for just 16 shelters across the state topped \$31M. Over 20% of the respondents need to replace their present facility many of which are over 40 years old. Over the past five years, three shelters have raised money through capital campaigns to build new buildings while others have only had enough funding to replace roofs or dog runs.

The state's humane societies, Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCAs) and animal shelters do not receive any direct state funding. Yet, they provide an important organizational need for their local communities. Article 7, Section 114 of the Agriculture and Markets Law requires every municipality to operate an animal shelter. In lieu of actually operating a shelter, many local municipalities contract out this function with local animal sheltering organizations. If our members and the other shelters across the state weren't in operation, local municipalities would be responsible for building, staffing and managing an animal shelter of their own. This would cost local taxpayers millions of dollars more than they are currently spending on their municipal animal sheltering contracts

Many individual humane societies and SPCAs provide these animal sheltering services to multiple municipalities. This, in effect, consolidates these services saving hard-earned tax dollars. For example, the Mohawk Hudson Humane Society provides these services to 18 Capital Region municipalities including the Cities of Albany, Troy, Cohoes, Rensselaer and Watervliet and the Towns of Berlin, Berne, Bethlehem, Coeymans, Colonie, Durham, East Greenbush, Green Island, Knox, New Scotland, North Greenbush, Schodack and Westerlo.

Without the Humane Society, each of these municipalities would have to build their own facility. As is typical with our members, no other facility in the region is large enough to consolidate the needs of so many municipalities in a single efficient shelter.

For those municipalities that do manage municipal shelters, shelter funding is just one of many competing priorities for the municipality with fire, police and emergency services often taking precedence.

There is limited, if any government funding, for the improvement of existing shelter facilities and funds received through municipal contracts just cover the direct costs of animal care.

The **Companion Animal Capital Fund** would provide humane societies and SPCAs as well as non-profit and municipal shelters with grants for shelter capital projects through a competitive application process. With better facilities, more people will come to the state's animal shelters to adopt companion animals and we can construct more efficient facilities that limit the cost of operation.

The **Companion Animal Capital Fund** will enable eligible sheltering organizations to focus their fund raising efforts on those programs that enhance the care of the animals—dogs, cats, puppies, kittens, birds, reptiles and even rabbits--in their facilities as well as within the community. This initiative will help put funding for shelter capital projects where it belongs—with our state's humane societies, SPCAs as well as non-profit and municipal shelters. Updated and upgraded facilities will enhance animal care and health, increase humane education and create more companion animal adoptions.

Expedited Adoption for Cats

Last year, both the Assembly and the Senate had bills that would cut the waiting period shelters have to hold cats from five to seven days to three. The Senate passed S.7464. We are hoping the Assembly Agriculture Committee will take up A.9803A which is sponsored by Assembly Member Santabarbara early in the coming session.

The bill provides for expedited adoption of owner surrendered cats as well as cats who come in without identification. As long as a shelter routinely provides spay and neuter services, these cats would be put up for adoption within three day following assessment and spay/neutering.

Some may think that three days isn't enough time. We have found, however, that only 5% of the cats that come into New York's shelters are reclaimed by their owners. In fact, 70% of all cats that come into the shelter are either owner surrender or stray cats. Of these cats, 90% are adopted. Our goal is to get them adopted more quickly and hopefully increase that rate.

The average length of stay for these cats in New York shelters is 32 days for cats under one year and 46 days for cats over one year. Consequently, the number of Care Days in 2015--the number of total days individual cats are cared for in one year in our shelters--is 1,945,633 days. If the costs per day to care for one cat is \$10.00 (and most would argue it is significantly higher) the cost to 88 sheltering organizations across New York minimally exceeds \$19.4M annually.

Shelter administrators know that longer mandatory holding times do not serve the best interests of the cats, the organizations caring for them or the communities in which they reside. Shelter stays are very stressful places for cats and can have significant negative impacts on not only their health and well-being but also their chance at a successful live outcome. Most sheltering facilities house cats in high-density environments where they have daily exposure to animals with unknown medical histories and disease risk. At the same time, many animals admitted to shelters have had little or no preventive care prior to admission. These factors, coupled with the direct effects of significant stress, create a situation where there is a high potential that sheltered cats will become infected with a variety of contagious diseases, including upper respiratory infections, ringworm, and panleukopenia.

The practice of taking in stray cats and holding them for 5-7 days is outdated and does not serve cats, animal shelters, municipalities, or the community. Amending current legislation to allow shelters alternatives to outdated solutions is an important step in helping New York State implement humane practices concerning animals in our communities. Without alternatives it is very possible that private shelters may be forced to stop accepting stray cats increasing the burden on municipalities tremendously.

Mandatory Microchipping

When we try to tackle the issue of lost companion animals, the most effective way proven to return lost animals to their owners is the use of microchips. Assemblywoman Rosenthal is taking on the microchipping bill this year and we will be working diligently with her on its passage.

A 2009 study of more than 7,700 stray animals in the United States at animal shelters showed that dogs without microchips were returned to their owners **21.9%** of the time, whereas microchipped dogs were returned to their owners **52.2%** of the time. Cats without microchips were reunited with their owners only **1.8%** of the time, whereas microchipped cats went back home **38.5%** of the time.

We have seen in Texas as well as in Canada, Australia, England, and across Europe, standardization of chips and readers coupled with mandatory chipping has the highest rate of return.

Standardizing microchips and readers will greatly ease the economic strain lost animals place on the state's animal shelters. When reviewing 2015 numbers from the 88 animal shelters across New York State that use PetPoint for managing their shelter statistics, we found the following:

Intake of Strays	Return to Owner	Days of Care	Cost of Care
23,983	4,383	1,527,390	\$15,283,900

Standardizing microchips and readers as well as ultimately mandating microchipping and mandating registration will enable New York’s animal shelters to cut costs and enhance the overall care of the companion animals in their charge.

1. Standardizing the frequency of microchips used in New York State

It is essential that the chips implanted are on a standard frequency. Australia and Canada have both standardized chip frequency on the national level. These chips conform to the International Organization for Standardization using ISO 11784 and ISO 11785. ISO 11784 specifies the structure of the identification code. ISO 11785 specifies how the chip is activated and how the stored information is transferred to a chip scanner. The chips should also be ISO Conformant Full Duplex and run at a frequency of 134.2 kHz

2. Standardizing Chip Readers

Standardizing chips won’t do anyone any good unless we also standardize chip readers. It is essential that both veterinarians and animal shelters upgrade their readers to the standardized frequency we are recommending. There are some readers on the market that say they are universal. However, none of the scanners had 100% sensitivity.

The New York State Animal Protection Federation strongly supports the standardization of both microchips and readers to help shelters return lost animals to their owners.

Per Diem Funding for Animal Shelters That Provide Safe Haven for Animals of Victims of Domestic Violence

There’s no question within domestic violence law enforcement, legal and animal welfare communities that there is a **distinct link between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse**. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the American Humane Association, close to 71% of the companion animal-owning women who entered domestic violence/women’s shelters said that their abuser had also injured, maimed, killed or threatened family pets. This was done as either revenge or as a way of exerting psychological control over the women and, if there are any in the household, their children. Between 25% and 40% of battered women don’t leave their abusers because they are afraid of what will happen to their pets if they weren’t in the home.

In New York State, there aren’t many remedies for these women. The New York State Animal Protection Federation recognizes the need to create the political will to push forward policy and legislative initiatives to address the lack of protection for women and their companion animals.

Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal and State Senator David Carlucci sponsored legislation, A6626/S5372, mandating that domestic violence shelters take in service animals or therapy dogs of women who have left abusive relationships. Presently, there is one shelter in New York City, Safe Haven, which is part of the Urban Research Institute’s People and Animals Living Safely program, which allows women to bring their companion

animals with them. There are ten pet-friendly units in the 32-unit emergency shelter where survivors stay for an average of six months. This is the only shelter of its kind in NYS.

While this bill definitely has merit to help those with service and therapy dogs, it will be very difficult to transition domestic violence shelters across the state to be able to take in companion animals. To answer this issue, a number of humane societies and SPCAs across New York partner with their local Domestic Violence agencies and provide Safe Haven programs where the animal shelters care for the companion animals while the women are in the local DV shelter. These programs get no state support and are funded through private philanthropy. The shelters providing this service are:

- Mohawk Hudson Humane Society serving Albany and Rensselaer Counties
- Lollypop Farm, Humane Society of Greater Rochester
- Animal Protective Foundation serving Schenectady County
- SPCA Serving Erie County

In order to create a more vibrant network of Safe Haven programs, there needs to be a funding stream that would provide per diem reimbursement for the care and feeding of the companion animals.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.