



The Advocacy Voice of New York's Humane Societies, SPCAs, nonprofit and municipal animal shelters.

MEMO IN SUPPORT OF SHELTER WORKERS AND VETERINARIANS GETTING 1b STATUS FOR COVID VACCINATIONS

When the COVID19 pandemic caused the shutdown of a cross section of businesses, the halting of non-essential surgeries and a wholesale change in our daily lives, animal shelters were deemed essential services because the shelter professionals who worked there had one charge—to care for homeless companion animals who needed to be fed, cared for, walked, cleaned up after and receive needed veterinary care.

Shelters adapted to this new reality with adoptions by appointment, socially distant processes and procedures, mask wearing, cleaning protocols and the like. We were responsible members of the community, setting an example.

But, COVID has taken its toll at shelters. People have gotten sick despite the protocols in place. Even with mask wearing, there are incidences of exposure and subsequent sickness. No one is pointing blame but just pointing out the obvious—no one is safe unless they are vaccinated.

Despite shelters being deemed essential services at the beginning of the pandemic, our workers are not eligible for vaccines under the 1b status presently in place. This has caused a great deal of hardship for shelters and the professionals who work there.

It is time we recognize, that in times of economic turmoil like these, companion animals are often among the collateral damage. Therefore, the Federation considers it imperative that all shelter staff--those tasked with managing the care of homeless animals--need to be provided with COVID vaccines.

Just consider the following:

- **The Manhattan Animal Care Center has had to shut down to all intake except emergency services because of COVID exposure and ensuing sickness.** This means animals that are picked up by New York City animal control officers in Manhattan must travel to one of the other facilities the Animal Care Centers of NYC runs in one of the outer boroughs. This increases costs to the taxpayers—more travel time, more gas consumption, more bureaucracy.
- **Shelter Outreach Services, a rural-based mobile veterinary service that serves shelters throughout the Finger Lakes, Central New York, and the Southern Tier, have had to severely curtail services because their shelter partners had to suspend clinics due to COVID cases and risks.** Clinics have been cancelled because of the need to quarantine employees. This has resulted in more homeless animals in shelters not being spayed or neutered which is a necessity if we are to reduce the homeless animal

population and facilitate adoptions. All of this would be resolved if shelter staff, veterinarians and vet techs were in the 1b category for the vaccination.

- **Bideawee, a nonprofit shelter that operates in Manhattan and Long Island, has had to limit intake of animals.** To ensure protocols are followed and people are not exposed, Bideawee management has staff working in smaller teams which results in less intake of homeless animals. While Bideawee employees have come down with COVID, it has not caused a shut down but has cause increased stress among the staff. The nature of working with small animals—either through intake or surgery—makes social distancing difficult. Everyone is wearing PPE, but these shelter professionals still need to interact with adopters, vendors, animal hospital clients, foster care providers, etc. This puts Bideawee staff at risk.
- **Hornell Animal Shelter in Steuben County is faced with closure if more than one staff member gets sick with COVID.** This closure would be for a minimum of two weeks. Staff will still take care of animals with a skeleton crew but consider the financial drain this will cause the shelter.
- **Pets Alive in Middletown, NY shut down their cattery for one month because the entire cat staff came down with COVID.** Other professionals at the shelter had to work 28 days straight to care for the shelter’s entire cat population.
- **Central NY SPCA is only scheduling four adoption appointments per day severely impacting the number of adoptions.** Their shelter manager was out for three weeks with COVID. Another employee was hospitalized for over a month and almost lost her life. Folks who are asymptomatic have exposed shelter staff. CNYSPCA’s building is old and is not set up for social distancing thus the need to limit adoption appointments to just four per day—this impacts their financial situation as well.
- **Dutchess County SPCA has been working with a skeleton crew for months.** There have been two COVID cases at the shelter. The staff has been divided into a rotation so that not everyone would be quarantined at the same time. A skeleton crew means less intakes which means less adoptions which means fiscal strain.
- **Humane Society of Yates County has had to limit hours, stagger staffing, cancel shelter fundraisers and work with only half of a small staff because the Humane Society’s staff cannot get vaccinated.** Adoptions have dropped off significantly since March 2020 and the shelter’s off-site veterinarian has had to significantly cut back on spay/neuter surgeries because they, also, are not eligible for vaccinations.
- **Mohawk Hudson Humane Society in Albany County experienced a 40 percent drop in adoptions and a 20 percent decrease in spay/neuter services.** The shelter is on a skeleton crew to manage COVID exposure and is open by appointment only. This has caused a hardship on the animals and the community—it is harder to access the Pet Food Pantry and other services for low-income folks because of limited hours.

These are just nine examples from over 70 Federation members across New York. We understand that the Federal government is making more vaccines available to New York State.

The Federation and our members call on Governor Cuomo and the Department of Health to add shelter professionals, workers, veterinarians, and vet techs to the 1b category for COVID vaccine access.