



# BRIAN MAIENSCHIEIN

ASSEMBLYMEMBER, SEVENTY-SIXTH DISTRICT

## Assembly Bill 781

### Sheltering for Evacuees with Pets

*As Introduced 2/13/2023*

#### **Summary**

AB 781 would require a county, on or before July 1, 2024, to update its emergency plan to designate emergency shelters able to accommodate persons with pets.

Also, this bill would require a city or county to include whether the cooling or warming center can accommodate pets whenever a city or county provides public information regarding the availability of emergency shelter facilities.

#### **Background**

The rate of natural disasters and extreme weather events is rapidly increasing across the United States, causing significant risk to public health and community safety. Sharing in this risk, but often overlooked, are residents' pets, the impact they have on Californians decision-making during an emergency, and the level of preparedness required to ensure safe and effective emergency evacuations.

According to the ASPCA survey, 83% of pet owners live in an area impacted by disasters, yet less than half have a preparedness in place. More than one in five pet owners have evacuated their homes due to a disaster or emergency and nearly half have left at least one pet behind when they

evacuated. Currently, a lack of public preparedness, unclear state guidance, and the low rate of pet-friendly emergency shelter facilities (co-shelters) where people can take and stay with their pets are enhancing the human risks associated with any emergency response. Major threats to public health and safety associated with a failure to adequately plan for animal evacuation and co-sheltering include:

- Pet owners may refuse evacuation. Threatening their own safety and that of first responders. Studies have found the most significant risk factor for evacuation failure is pet ownership.
- Pet owners may attempt to illegally reenter evacuation sites to rescue their animals. It's estimated that 80% of people who prematurely reenter an evacuation site do so to rescue a pet

During the 2018 Carr Fire, many evacuees fled to emergency shelters with their pets and refused to be separated when told the pets could not enter the shelter. According to an NPR interview following the fire, many residents who chose to sleep outside in triple digit temperatures and thick smoke, rather than leave their pets in a separate shelter.

### **Existing Law**

In 2006, the United States passed the Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS ACT), requiring states, counties, and cities to “account for the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals before, during, and following a major disaster or emergency” in order to receive federal funding for their disaster relief plans.

The PETS Act allows the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide funding to states and localities for the creation, operation, and maintenance of pet-friendly emergency shelters (co-shelters), along with other emergency preparedness actions for companion animals.

### **This Bill**

Assembly Bill 781 would ensure that when an emergency shelter, warming center, or cooling center is designated, at least one co-shelter facility is also designated, removing the question from residents’ mind whether they may be forced to choose between safety and their beloved animal.

Also, this bill would require information on pet emergency preparedness and co-shelter facilities be shared on local government websites, improving public preparedness.

This bill will help organize emergency response, streamline messaging to increase public emergency planning and safety, help ensure evacuation compliance, and conserve valuable personal and financial resources for use across multiple emergencies.

### **Support**

ASPCA (Sponsor)

California Animal Welfare Association

### **Contact Info**

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