



A Private Charity Since 1881

Testimony of the
Connecticut Humane Society
in support of

H.B. 5392 An Act Concerning the State Response to a Declared State of Emergency

Public Safety and Security Committee
March 6, 2012

Senator Hartley, Representative Dargan and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Humane Society (CHS). CHS represents over 350 active volunteers contributing nearly 18,000 volunteer hours in 2011. CHS annually shelters more than 6,000 domestic animals at three separate animal shelter facilities in CT. In addition, the Fox Memorial Clinic provides treatment and care to another 7,000 animals annually.

CHS supports HB 5392, An Act Concerning the State Response to a Declared State of Emergency, and respectfully offers some insights into the impact on people and animals when a state emergency is declared.

Generally, CHS believes that incorporated into any such plan should be a system for the coordination of local and state resources in response to pet, farm, and wild animal-care needs immediately before, during, and following a significant natural or man-made emergency. The plan should explore and determine the appropriate overall management, coordination, and prioritization of statewide resources that support pet, farm, and wild animal needs in the event of a declared emergency or disaster.

The number of domestic animals in the USA rivals the human population. In addition to tens of millions of farm stock, Americans care for more than 60 million dogs and 70 million cats. In Connecticut 64% of households have one or more companion animals. Thousands of domestic animals and livestock rely on human caretakers. Experiences of emergency workers around the country have found that people in distress many times would not leave their beloved pets even in the face of imminent danger. That conclusion should resonate with all emergency management planners.

A significant natural or man-made disaster could quickly overwhelm not only these caretakers but also local government's ability to provide immediate evacuation and backup support. Such a disaster could pose threats to emergency workers who are tasked with emergency evaluation and public safety and health issues such as displacement, injury and death among animals, increased risk of the spread of highly contagious diseases, strain on emergency care, shelter, and rescue capabilities, interruptions in agriculture, and related issues. Additionally, addressing these problems could increase other human needs and drain response resources. The possibility of such a disaster necessitates that a plan

addresses risks to animals and people by utilizing and coordinating non-profit, local, state and/or federal resources.

Our experience shows that during the January 1998 ice storm in upstate New York, farmers were ill prepared for the power outage and could not milk the cows in their dairy herd. Those animals suffered over the days and weeks and in many cases, had to be killed to prevent suffering. People who were stranded were without food for themselves and their pets and the State's ability to respond was limited. Shipments of emergency food could not be delivered effectively as there were no local response plans in place for such an emergency.

The hurricanes that hit Florida in 2004 in close sequence to one another tested the State's rudimentary emergency planning but became the bellwether event leading to much more diverse and developed emergency plans with government emergency management planners, the Red Cross and the non-profit sector coming together to create better plans borne from their experiences. As the chief executive officer of a large animal sheltering facility, we were intimately involved in the development, planning and ultimately the response team for the care of first responder companion animals, special assistance client animals, and the county's first human/animal shelter.

One only needs to look at our experiences with people and animals in the storms that hit Florida in 2004, with Katrina in 2005 as well as the many flash floods and fires that have occurred recently to understand that people see their animals as part of the family. The Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act. (PETS Act) of 2006 required FEMA to ensure that state, tribal, and local emergency plans address the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals prior to, during, and following a major disaster or emergency.

These experiences demonstrate the need to have an integrated and coordinated plan in place when disaster occurs. In fact this past summer, as Irene was racing its way up the east coast, CHS was contacted by the state to assist at the last minute in preparing for the potential displacement of an unknown number of animals in CT. If only there was a comprehensive and integrated preparedness plan for animal welfare in place. A plan complete with designated human/ animal shelters, trained volunteers and operating procedures to protect the animals of our state and also to preserve an important peace of mind for the many thousands of first responders and displaced residents as a result of a declared state of emergency.

HB 5392 outlines a process for the development of an emergency preparedness plan for state and local agencies but it does not appear to incorporate the needs of pet, farm or other animals. CHS recommends language be added to specify the integration of pet, farm or other animal needs in any final plan as well as to incorporate within Section 1 (1) and (2) the establishment of operating procedures specifying the roles of state and local government, private sector, and volunteer agencies that are assigned the responsibility for animal care and safety in a disaster. A critical component of such a plan should include how to communicate and coordinate their actions in an emergency to effectively deploy their capabilities.

As one of the state's publicly recognized advocates for animals, we strive to work collaboratively with state and local agencies as well as other not for profit animal advocacy organizations. CHS is most interested in participating in the appropriate manner to assist in developing the animal care component of the final EPP.

We look forward to working together to ensure Connecticut pets, farm and other animals are well protected and safe when disaster strikes.

Respectfully submitted,

Gordon G. Willard
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