



**TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING
ON 2016-17 EXECUTIVE BUDGET—NYS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND MARKETS**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to you today on behalf of the New York State Animal Protection Federation. 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.

Companion Animal Capital Fund

Our focus for the FY16-17 budget will be the inclusion of at least \$5M 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. **In a recent survey, we found that 15 shelters across the state had capital needs in excess of \$26M.**

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 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.

The Federation is asking for a recurring funding stream of \$5 million.

Companion Animal Tax Credit

Another monetary priority for the upcoming fiscal year would be the **Companion Animal Tax Credit bill**. Sponsored in 2016 by Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal (A.6770A) and State Senator Pattie Ritchie (S.3670B), the bill would provide a \$100 tax credit to any New York State taxpayer for adopting a dog, cat or other household pet from one of the state's humane societies, SPCAs or an animal shelter, either non-profit or municipal. The tax credit will be dependent on the animal's owner showing proof of spay or neutering—one of the hallmarks of professional animal shelter standards.

In 2014, 74,000 dogs and cats were adopted from

- NYC Animal Care and Control and the other shelters from across the city
- North Shore Animal League America, and
- 83 organizations throughout New York that manage their data on PetPoint, a shelter management system used by many of NYS' animal shelters

If this was in effect in 2014, taxpayers would have realized \$7.4M in tax credits for simply doing the humane thing—adopting a companion animal from a shelter. The lucky dogs and cats that were adopted are now out of a shelter that cared for and nurtured the animal making sure it was ready for adoption and in loving homes where the dogs and/or cats are now “part of the family.”

Creating this tax credit will give our members—the state's humane societies and SPCAs as well as non-profit and municipal animal shelters—additional opportunities to educate their communities on the benefits of adopting a shelter animal. Making this humane choice is not only good for the dogs and cats but also good for the people who adopt. Having a companion animal enhances one's quality of life and, at times, can be a life saver.

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.

Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal and State Senator David Carlucci sponsored legislation, A6626/S5372, would mandate 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 shelter 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. This would be the third funding initiative the Federation will support this year.

Make Animal Abuse in the Presence of a Child a Felony

We would also like to see further legislative discussion on Assemblywoman Rosenthal's bill, A534, which makes animal cruelty in the presence of a child a felony.

Adults who commit acts of animal cruelty in the presence of a child inflict psychological damage on the minor who is forced to witness these crimes, They can also permanently imperil a still-developing minor's sense of judgment and ethical conduct. By increasing the penalty for animal cruelty when engaging in such cruelty in the presence of a child, this behavior can be curtailed and its consequences can be more thoroughly recognized.

Holding Time for Cats and Kittens

One initiative that would impact the financial health of shelters but have no budgetary impact on the state would be a bill, not yet sponsored, that would give animal shelters the ability to immediately put up for adoption cats that come into their facilities without any type of identification. Right now, shelters must hold these animals for at least five days and then decide what will happen to the cat. The shelter community wants the ability to immediately spay or neuter and vaccinate the cat, return it to a managed community if it is feral or immediately adopt it out or transfer it to another organization that will also facilitate adoption.

The costs to hold onto these cats, the overwhelming majority of them who are never claimed by a previous owner, stretches scarce resources. In the spring time, shelters can be overrun with kittens many of whom can be adopted out immediately without having the shelter incur additional costs.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.