

Animal Welfare and Covid-19

The coronavirus pandemic and its impact on society have had profound consequences for New Yorkers and their pets. Our commitment to those most in need in New York City has led us to shift our operational focus to provide New Yorkers the kind of increased support they desperately need during this time of crisis. We have provided free pet food and emergency animal boarding services for overwhelmed New Yorkers; delivered expanded Urgent Veterinary Care services at our ASPCA Animal Hospital in Manhattan, Community Veterinary Center in the Bronx, and in our mobile primary pet care clinic in Brooklyn; and partnered with the NYC Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to establish and run a COVID-19 Pet Hotline, which serves as an information, planning, referral and service coordination hub for residents seeking support for their pets during the pandemic. In total, the ASPCA has provided \$7.5 million through its COVID-19 Relief & Recovery Initiative to help pet owners and animal welfare groups impacted by the pandemic.

ASPCA research shows that a lack of affordable veterinary care and limited access to spay/neuter services are primary contributors to pet relinquishment and that many of these challenges can be effectively alleviated with minimal resources. Responding to these insights, the ASPCA launched a groundbreaking, multi-year initiative to invest more than \$45 million to build and operate ASPCA Community Veterinary Center facilities in New York City. These new operations will provide low-income pet owners with access to basic and urgent veterinary care, including vaccinations, spay/neuter surgery, and establish a highly specialized facility in the Hudson Valley to care for and rehabilitate canine victims of cruelty primarily seized by the New York City Police Department. Once operational, these NYC facilities (our Bronx and Brooklyn facilities are now open, with a facility in planned to follow in Queens), will also treat homeless dogs and cats being cared for by animal rescue organizations, expanding the ASPCA's services to the animal rescue community. The new centers will have a meaningful, direct impact on tens of thousands of animals and their owners each year.

NEW YORK CITY POLICY PRIORITIES:**Animal Care Centers of NYC's Pet Retention Program**

Strategic and well-resourced safety net programs must be in place to enable and encourage collaboration between key agencies (animal shelters, rescues, veterinarians, law enforcement, human service providers, food banks and policy makers) to identify ways to maximize opportunities to keep pets and people together.

Animal Care Centers of NYC (ACC) is a national leader in the placement of dogs, cats and rabbits among shelters that publicly report data and have average annual intakes exceeding 25,000 animals. Since 2017, ACC has maintained a placement rate of more than 90%, making New York City one of the nation's leaders in the placement of dogs, cats, and rabbits among high-intake shelters. In FY'20 the New York City Council appropriated \$3 million dollars to ACC allowing them to fund an innovative approach to preventing animal surrenders. Their safety net services included admissions counseling for owners considering relinquishing their animals, providing owners with alternate solutions to enable them to keep their pets, and programs like Community Pets, which provides critical resources, pet food, veterinary care and microchips to families in underserved neighborhoods—offering a vital resource that is needed now more than ever as New York City continues to face the challenges brought on by the COVID pandemic. Unfortunately, due to the City's financial hardships, this funding was cut for FY'21.

We must ensure that this funding is reinstated and enhanced so that ACC can continue to provide these critical programs throughout the city. We expect the need for pet retention work to grow as the pandemic continues to unfold, and as housing challenges for pet owners - especially those with lower incomes – will result in surrenders to the shelter system. This funding would be in addition to capital allocated for building much needed full-service animal shelters in the Bronx and Queens. The City needs to provide adequate operational funding for these upcoming facilities in order for them to provide the crucial programs and services our communities need and deserve.

Increase Pet-Friendly Housing Options

New York City's laws and policies should be expanded to increase affordable pet friendly housing options as well as the ability of the homeless and victims of domestic violence to seek refuge in shelters with their pets.

Housing insecurity is a daunting problem that looms over New Yorkers, and those with pets are especially vulnerable in the increasingly difficult housing market. We must urgently clarify

existing housing law to permit homeowners in the City to be allowed to retain their pets. Concurrently, we are prioritizing efforts to lift restrictions on keeping pets in rental housing. Tenants who own pets are often forced to make the anguishing choice between relinquishing their pet or risk losing their home, leading some to surrender their beloved family pets to an already overburdened animal shelter.

Additionally, we need to adopt and promote co-sheltering in City funded homeless and domestic violence shelters. Victims of domestic violence, along with their children and pets, are often compelled to “stay at home” with their abusers, and homeless individuals with pets are routinely denied access to shelters. The prohibition of animals in city shelters, drop-in centers, and transitional housing programs presents a major barrier for those who would accept placement if not for their pets.

We have seen that co-sheltering – an innovative housing approach that keeps pets and people together – works. Here in NYC, we can point to the successful PALS (People and Animals Living Safely) program created by The Urban Resource Institute (URI), a domestic violence shelter and service provider. URI discovered that nearly half of its clients stayed in abusive relationships to prevent harm to their pets. URI now has animal-friendly accommodations at six facilities, which have allowed more than 100 families to escape domestic violence. This model is replicable, and the City should implement it directly or incentivize its contracted providers to do so.

Evictions

The ASPCA has worked with policymakers to limit eviction proceedings during the pandemic to ensure that people and pets have a safe and secure place to call home as the COVID-19 crisis continues. The New York State Legislature passed the Emergency Eviction and Foreclosure Prevention Act, pausing evictions through the end of February, and recently extended this requirement through May 1, 2021. This means that pending eviction cases can start moving forward again in court — and new cases can be filed — unless a tenant submits a hardship declaration form to either the court or the landlord. We are working with Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare, the Mayor's Office of Tenant Protection and NYC Emergency Management's Animal Planning Task Force, to connect vulnerable tenants at risk of losing their pets while facing a potential eviction with free and low-cost resources to aid them in keeping their pets.

Implement the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP)

The inefficiency of our food system is staggering. On average, a New York City household wastes 8.7 pounds of food every week, even though six pounds of this food is edible at the time it is thrown out. Food waste at individual and institutional levels can be curbed. Each year, 11 City agencies serve almost 240 million meals and snacks in a variety of settings, including schools, after school programs, public hospitals, and correctional facilities. Not only is this buying power an opportunity to reduce food waste, but to advance good food purchasing standards.

The ASPCA is working in cities around the country—alongside health, environment, education, and fair labor advocates—to help public institutions source higher-welfare and more just, sustainable food. The ASPCA helped craft the GFPP’s current animal welfare standards, and we support campaigns in localities around the country by providing issue expertise, lobbying and testifying in support of GFPP initiatives, activating our local supporter bases, and even providing funding.

Locally, we support the adoption of the GFPP by the Mayor’s Office of Food Policy and are encouraged by its inclusion in the City’s first ten-year food plan. Additionally, we support Intro. 1660, which would create a good food purchasing program and establish an advisory board to ensure that city-procured food advances goals that support the following value areas: local economies, nutrition, valued workforce, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability.

About the ASPCA

Founded in 1866, the ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) is the first animal welfare organization in North America and serves as the nation’s leading voice for animals. More than two million supporters strong, the ASPCA’s mission is to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States. As a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit corporation, the ASPCA is a national leader in the areas of anti-cruelty, community outreach and animal health services.

With over 8 million residents and more than three million companion animals, New York City’s five boroughs have long been the ideal backdrop for the ASPCA’s many programs. We work in communities all over New York City, playing many roles in caring for the City’s animals whether they are well loved companions, strays, or victims of cruelty. The ASPCA works throughout the boroughs offering such low-cost and no-cost spay/neuter and vaccination clinics; cruelty intervention advocacy; affordable primary veterinary care at our community clinics and our premiere hospital allowing us to serve shelter pets as well as the public’s companion animals; and a Humane Law Enforcement team that works with the New York City Police Department (NYPD) to investigate animal cruelty.