



***NYSAPF is the voice of New York's humane societies, SPCAs, non-profit and municipal animal shelters as well as animal welfare organizations that focus on homeless animals.***

## **TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET COMMITTEE**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION BUDGET HEARING**

#### **SFY 2018-19 STATE BUDGET and LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

**Presented by Libby Post, Executive Director of the NYS Animal Protection Federation**

I want to thank Senate Finance Committee Chair Catharine M. Young and Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair Helene E. Weinstein for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the New York State Animal Protection Federation (NYSAPF). 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**

The Federation and our member shelters are incredibly thankful to the Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Pattie Ritchie and Assembly Agriculture Committee Chair Bill Magee, the members of the Agriculture Committee in both houses and especially to State Senator Phil Boyle and Assembly Member Deborah Glick for sponsoring the \$5 million Companion Animal Capital Fund in the SFY 2017-18 budget. The CACF is the first of its kind in the nation.

By providing financial assistance for the construction, renovation, rehabilitation, installation, acquisition, or expansion of buildings, equipment, or facilities, this fund will begin to address the overwhelming need to assist the state's humane societies, SPCAs and municipal animal shelters maintain and improve their infrastructure. The Fund will help underwrite capital projects that will enable the secure containment, health and care of companion animals—dogs and cats—in the care of our members and the rest of New York's sheltering community.

The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets is about to announce the awards for the first year of the fund—that's the \$5 million reappropriation you see in the Governor's present budget proposal. There were 29 applications for over \$13 million. Clearly, not all of the proposals could be funded. Only 14 applications were approved.

What this shows us is the need to make the Companion Animal Capital Fund permanent with funding each year in the state budget. We know that \$8 million in applications were not fulfilled. We also know that there were a number of shelters that just weren't ready yet but are planning to do capital improvements in the near future.

New York State Animal Protection Federation Testimony to NYS Senate Environmental Conservation Committee  
On 2018-19 Budget and the 2018 Legislative Session

We are asking the legislature to lead again this year by providing \$5M in new funding for the CACF in the SFY 2018- 19 budget.

This is an investment that will save taxpayer dollars. As you know, 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 resource for their local communities. Article 7, Section 114 of the 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 nonprofit 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.

By continuing to make an investment in the Companion Animal Capital Fund, we are saving taxpayer dollars while enhancing the lives of the animals in our care.

### **Our Legislative Agenda**

While we are still solidifying our entire legislative agenda for the coming session, I can tell you that we will again revisit legislation that would cut the waiting period shelters have to hold cats from five to seven days to three. The Senate has passed this legislation, sponsored by Senator Marchione, two years in a row. We are hoping the third year will be the charm for the Assembly.

The bill enables shelter to rehome owner-surrendered cats as well as cats who come in without identification more quickly. As long as a shelter routinely provides spay and neuter services, these cats would be put up for adoption within three day following assessment and spay/neutering.

Some may think that three days isn't enough time. We have found, however, that owners reclaim only 4% of the cats that come into New York's shelters. Of the 16,371 stray cats that were brought to New York's shelters, only 4%--690--were returned to their owners. 69% of all cats that come into our shelters are either owner surrender or strays. Of these cats, 93% are adopted. Our goal is to get them adopted more quickly and hopefully increase that rate.

***Attached is an infographic that details the average lengths of stay for cats in New York's shelter and the economic impact of caring for them.***

Shelter administrators know that longer mandatory holding times do not serve the best interests of the cats, the organizations caring for them or the communities in which they reside. The practice of taking in stray cats and holding them for 5-7 days is outdated and does not serve cats, animal shelters, municipalities, or the community. Amending current legislation to allow shelters alternatives to outdated solutions is an important step in helping New York State implement humane practices concerning animals in our communities. Without

alternatives it is very possible that private shelters may be forced to stop accepting stray cats increasing the burden on municipalities tremendously.

***Animal Cruelty Law Enforcement***

This year, the Federation will establish a Division of Animal Cruelty Law Enforcement and begin to look at the legislative and policy issues that affect animal control officers, dog control officers and humane law enforcement officers. Right now, there is no organized effort to look at these policies and propose legislative remedies. We will be forming a regional advisory council that mirrors the regions used by the State Police to reflect the close working relationship of law enforcement with shelter professionals. We are working on bills which would expand the residency requirements for peace officers who serve the Mohawk Hudson Humane Society and the Humane Society of the Hudson Valley.

***Extreme Cold and Companion Animals***

This year, the extremely cold temperatures generated by the Polar Vortex have brought into focus the need to provide adequate outdoor shelter for animals as well as the need to bring them inside when the temperature drops below 32 degrees. We will be redoubling our efforts on the existing outdoor shelter bill which has passed the Senate as well as develop legislation that will be the centerpiece of our



Again, thank you for the opportunity to present this to you today. On behalf of the Federation, I look forward to working with you this session.