

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5337

As of February 23, 2009

Title: An act relating to animal emergency operations.

Brief Description: Providing for animal emergency operations.

Sponsors: Senators Jacobsen and Shin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/23/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

Background: Efforts to evacuate New Orleans in response to Hurricane Katrina were complicated because many pet owners were unwilling to abandon their pets. Emergency shelters were unable or unwilling to accept pets, a fact that dissuaded many pet owners from seeking safety.

On October 6, 2006, then President George Bush signed into law H.R. 3858, which amends the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to ensure that state and local emergency preparedness operational plans address the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals following a major disaster or emergency.

The state Military Department, specifically the Emergency Management Division, administers emergency management and disaster relief programs. Local jurisdictions are directed to establish comprehensive local emergency management plans. Local jurisdictions may also establish and operate joint local emergency management organizations.

Summary of Bill: The Washington State Military Department's Emergency Management Division (EMD), in cooperation with county and local governments, must prepare, as part of the state Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, animal emergency planning guidance for local jurisdictions that provides for the evacuation, transportation, and temporary sheltering of pets and service animals during a major disaster or an emergency.

In developing the guidance, EMD must consider:

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- allowing owners of service animals to be evacuated, transported, and sheltered with or near their service animals;
- establishing a sufficient number of evacuation shelters equipped to temporarily shelter pets and service animals in close proximity to a human sheltering facility;
- allowing owners and their pets to be evacuated together, whenever possible, provided that human life is not endangered;
- transporting pets or service animals, in cages or carriers that safely and securely confine the animals, provided that such transportation does not endanger human life;
- recommending that animal shelters, human societies, veterinary offices, boarding kennels, breeders, grooming facilities, animal testing facilities, and any other entity that normally houses pets or service animals create evacuation plans for the animals housed at their facilities;
- recommending guidance for holding periods for pets or service animals that are sheltered during a major disaster or an emergency; and
- encouraging local jurisdictions to create an educational campaign for owners of pets or service animals that will encourage owners to plan for and incorporate their animals in the owners' personal plans in the event of a major disaster or an emergency.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 17, 2009.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The background to this bill comes from Hurricane Katrina and the chaos that ensued. People refused to leave their animals and chose to die with them. It should never come to that. Not only does this create a terrible choice for people to make, it places emergency responders in difficult situations. Police and Firemen are placed in a situation to either force an unwilling person to leave or to leave the person behind. More than one person has stated they would physically resist an order to leave and might actually assault anyone who attempted to harm their pet or leave the pet behind. The passage of this bill should allow people to be rescued with their animals.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Ken Jacobsen, Prime Sponsor; Senator Darlene Fairley.