



March 23, 2020

The Honorable Ralph Northam, Governor of Virginia
The Honorable Bettina Ring, Secretary of Agriculture & Forestry
The Honorable Bradley Copenhaver, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture & Forestry

Re: Animal care as essential services throughout the COVID-19 crisis

Dear Governor Northam, Secretary Ring and Deputy Secretary Copenhaver,

Thank you for leading the state through uncertain times. We recognize the seriousness of COVID-19 and the role we all must play in protecting the community by supporting State and Federal measures to contain its impact. Animal services across the state have taken action over the last weeks to pare down to critical services and use social distancing measures. They will continue to do so to protect the health and safety of their staff and the community we share. **We are writing to urge your office to include provisions for the care of live animals in any shelter-in-place or restrictive emergency orders for Virginia during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

It is critical that facilities that provide for the care of live animals be able to maintain their core services throughout this pandemic. As Hurricane Katrina highlighted, human and animal lives are inextricably intertwined, and human safety is supported when animals are part of the plan.

We ask that essential veterinary care and healthcare services pertaining to animals, businesses and entities that provide food, shelter, and other necessities of life for animals be included as essential in any shelter-at-home order or other restrictive public policy being promulgated as a result of the pandemic. Animals remain in the care of animal shelters, and animals in need will continue to come into the shelters as a result of emergency surrender intake. Animals may also need emergency veterinary services. We also request that animal care businesses such as pet and livestock supply stores be considered “essential services” as well as doggy daycares, dog walkers and pet sitters that may need to provide support to essential personnel.

Many facilities have core staff teams in place to deliver essential services and care for animals. It is critical that they retain the ability for those employees to go to work and transport animals should a shelter-at-home order be issued. The animals who are living in the state’s animal shelters need to be fed. Dogs need to be walked. Cat boxes and kennels need to be cleaned. Sick animals need to be cared for. These are jobs and tasks that people cannot do from home. Just as healthcare professionals must come in to care for patients in a nursing home or provide lifesaving procedures in hospitals, the work of animal service professionals and veterinarians is essential to the health and well-being of the animals in their care.

California, Illinois and New York explicitly include animal services in their list of “essential services,” and we expect other states will do the same as more shelter-at-home orders come. We

specifically suggest the following exemption language from the Illinois order, which preserves the critical services they provide:

- Under the healthcare category: “Healthcare and Public Health Operations also includes veterinary care and all healthcare services provided to animals”
- Under the charitable and social services category: “Businesses and religious and secular nonprofit organizations, including food banks, when providing food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals, individuals who need assistance as a result of this emergency”
- Under the food and beverage category: “Businesses that provide food, shelter, and other necessities of life for animals, including animal shelters, rescues, shelters, kennels, and adoption facilities.”

<https://www2.illinois.gov/IISNews/21288-Gov.PritzkerStayatHomeOrder.pdf>).

In addition, we are willing to provide any support requested in drafting language or sharing what’s in place in other states.

Thank you for your support and all you are doing to protect our communities during his unprecedented crisis. We stand by to support your administration.

Sincerely,

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