

PALS POLICY

“Pawprint” For Action



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Pets are part of the family. For many survivors of domestic violence and their families, the human-animal bond provides an important source of comfort and companionship and is proven to aid in healing from the trauma they have endured.^{vi}

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, nearly 20 people in the United States are abused by an intimate partner every minute, which amounts to more than 10 million women and men (equal to about half the population of New York State) in one year!ⁱ Here in New York State, nearly 85,000 people were victimized by an intimate partner in 2021, the most recent year for which data is available.ⁱⁱ In 2019, domestic homicides accounted for nearly a quarter of all homicides in New York State.ⁱⁱⁱ

Leaving an abusive situation is not easy. Survivors of domestic violence encounter many barriers to leaving, including fear of elevated violence, isolation from family and friends, impact on children, economic obstacles and lack of resources, immigration issues and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in relationships by law enforcement and support services.^{iv}

In addition to these barriers:

- **37% of survivors with pets** say their abusers threatened, hurt or killed their pets as leverage to prevent them from leaving or to force them to return.
- **29% reported their pet was harmed or killed.**
- **50% of survivors report that they could not leave an abusive situation** if they could not take their pet with them.^v



In 2023, the tenth anniversary year of PALS, the program has provided:

Services to nearly
700 pets

Safe shelter for families
for a total of more than

211,000 nights^{vii}

PALS: A Decade of People and Animals Living Safely

The pioneering People and Animals Living Safely (PALS) program was born in 2013 when Urban Resource Institute (URI) piloted the first pet-inclusive shelter in New York City where survivors could co-live with their pets in the safety of our shelter. Since then, URI expanded its PALS program to include **9 shelters** and **304 apartment style units** across four boroughs.

URI PALS program accommodates companion animals of all species, from cats and dogs to birds and lizards. Through valued partnerships, URI provides pets with free food, supplies and access to veterinary care, behavioral support and more.

Today, URI remains the only provider of temporary housing services in New York City that allows people and pets to co-live in temporary housing.

URI aims to change that. This “Pawprint” is a start, designed to lay a foundation for policy makers and service providers alike. The goal is to create a regulatory environment that supports the expansion of PALS programming, both at URI and

across the state, while providing a model for other cities and states to follow.

Nearly every day, the New York City Hotline receives calls from survivors with pets who cannot find safety and healing in shelter because they do not want to be separated from their pets or leave their animals behind.^{viii}

As part of our commitment to remove barriers to safety and healing for survivors of domestic violence, URI aims to provide comprehensive training and technical assistance to temporary housing providers that are interested in implementing a PALS program of their own.

In the last ten years, URI has learned so much about the profound impact that the human-animal bond can have on healing. We know that with a little support, every shelter in the state could be fully pet inclusive, and as a result, survivors with pets will not face the agonizing choice of staying in a dangerous situation or leaving their furry family member behind.

**The following pages outline URI’s recommendations to our partners in government.
We look forward to your partnership.**

Congress

Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act – URI Supports

Status: Up for Reauthorization

Originally authorized as part of the 2018 Farm Bill, the PAWS Act directed \$3 million in grant funding, via the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to programs that provide shelter and housing assistance to domestic violence survivors with companion animals.

The Farm Bill is reauthorized every five years; the US Congress must reauthorize the Farm Bill in 2023.

In addition to funding the grant program, the PAWS Act encourages state-issued orders of protection to include companion animals and expands the definition of stalking.

URI supports the reauthorization of the Farm Bill, along with \$5 million appropriation for the PAWS Act.

Providing for Unhoused People with Pets (PUPP) Act – URI Supports

Status: H.R. 8074 117th Congress (2021-2022) Rep. Jason Crow (D-CO-6)

Subject to available appropriations, the PUPP Act authorizes the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to make grants to programs that provide temporary and permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness who have pets.

Like the PAWS Act, the PUPP Act would help encourage development of temporary housing for people with pets who are experiencing homelessness. There are currently no shelters for unhoused people in New York that accept companion animals unless they are designated service or emotional support animals.

URI supports the PUPP Act and advocates for its inclusion in the FARM Act, along with \$3 million in appropriations.



New York State

Continuing Education Credits for Veterinarians Providing Free Care to Companion Animals in Temporary Shelter – URI Supports

Status: Pending Introduction by Deputy Majority Leader Mike Gianaris & Assembly member Linda B. Rosenthal

Pursuant to section 6704-a and 6711-b of New York State Education Law, veterinarians are required to complete 45 hours of continuing education (CE) every three years. Veterinarians are currently permitted (but not required) to satisfy a portion of this requirement by providing free spay and neuter procedures. URI proposes that this requirement be extended to include free veterinary care to animals in temporary shelter for survivors of domestic violence and people experiencing homelessness.



The cost of providing veterinary care to animals in shelter is a major obstacle in the expansion of PALS programming to other agencies, as many providers cannot afford the additional cost. Encouraging licensed veterinarians to satisfy a portion of their triannual CE credits by providing free veterinary care to animals in shelter would help to eliminate this barrier and encourage more temporary housing providers to allow people and animals to co-live in their shelters.

URI supports allowing veterinarians to satisfy a portion of their continuing education requirement by providing free veterinary care to animals in temporary shelter.

New York State continued

PALS Operational and Capital Construction Fund – URI Supports

Status: Not yet introduced

As URI PALS program has grown over the years, we have been very intentional about constructing new, purpose-built shelters specifically designed to accommodate people along with their pets. Some of our PALS sites have animal washing and grooming rooms, others have outdoor pet parks which enable survivors and their pets to safely enjoy the outdoors and get some exercise. We provide each client who presents with an animal access to veterinary care, animal behaviorists and training, enrichment opportunities and the necessary, species-appropriate supplies, such as a crate, tank or cage, litter box and litter, leash, grooming tools, and, of course, food.

While URI is grateful for the support it has received from private and nonprofit partners, one of the obstacles providers have cited in offering PALS is the costs associated with implementation. Creating a dedicated state funding stream will support providers as they work to remove a significant barrier for survivors seeking safety and shelter from abuse in a temporary shelter.

URI supports the implementation of a PALS Operational and Capital Construction Fund.

Orders of Protection for Companion Animals – URI Supports

A.39 (L. Rosenthal) / S.5309 (Weik)

New York currently allows individuals to include companion animals in orders of protection. McKinney's Family Court Act § 842 specifically allows a court to order the respondent to refrain from intentionally injuring or killing, without justification, any companion animal the respondent knows to be owned, possessed, leased, kept or held by the petitioner or a minor child residing in the household.

Bill A.39/S.5390 would expand on this vital protection by granting custody of the subject animal to the party petitioning for the order of protection to ensure that the animal cannot be harmed by the respondent or alleged abuser. Abusers often use threats of harm or actual violence against animals to exert control over victims of domestic violence. Nearly 50% of survivors with pets have indicated that they are worried that their abuser would harm or kill their pet and one third of respondents reported that their abuser had harmed or killed a pet or threatened to do so.^x As a result, many survivors report that they would struggle to leave a dangerous situation if they were forced to leave their pet behind.

URI supports A.39/S.5309.



New York City

Companion Animals Permitted in Shelters for Families Experiencing Homelessness – URI Supports

Status: Not yet introduced

In 2012, New York City took dramatic action to reduce barriers to shelter by improving accommodations for people with pets who are experiencing homelessness. Local law 96 and 97 of 2021 now require New York City to create a comprehensive plan to make the shelter system more pet-accessible. Together they mandate reporting about instances when an individual is required to relinquish a pet upon entry into the shelter system^{xi}

Currently, people who are homeless and living with pets cannot bring their pets into shelter unless those animals are emotional support or service animals. We know that this prohibition creates a significant barrier for individuals and families with pets who are experiencing homelessness. Faced with the decision to enter shelter and leave their pet behind, many opt to keep their pets and search for alternative accommodations, which can often result in street homelessness.

In addition, many survivors of domestic violence enter the DHS system after they have reached the maximum number of allowable days in domestic violence shelter. URI PALS program has empowered some of these survivors to co-shelter with their pets in one of our 9 pet-friendly shelters. These survivors should not be forced to leave their pets behind as a condition of entry to the DHS system.

People and families experiencing street homelessness cite their inability to bring their pets with them to shelter as among the top reasons that they remain unhoused and living in dangerous outdoor or makeshift conditions. Keeping pets and people together is not simply an act of kindness. The human-animal bond is significant and meaningful, especially in times of trauma. URI research found that 86% of survivors reported that their pet offered emotional support, and the separation from a pet adds an additional level to the existing trauma of homelessness.

URI supports the introduction of legislation to remove a significant barrier to people seeking shelter. The city should allow all providers of temporary housing to accept companion animals.

New York City continued

PALS Training and Technical Assistance Program – URI Supports

Status: Not yet introduced

Local laws 96 and 97 of 2021 required the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to create a comprehensive plan to make the shelter system more pet accessible. The plan, which was released in July 2022, outlined a series of recommendations that should be considered before shelters for individuals and families experiencing homelessness begin accepting companion animals.^{xii}

In the ten years since URI piloted its first PALS program, we have developed and implemented comprehensive policies and procedures that guide our work and ensure scalability, operational success and overall safety. These policies and procedures address the recommendations outlined in the DHS report. Our best practices include a comprehensive temperament assessment at intake, standards for basic veterinary care and behavioral support, the provision of species-specific supplies and support, along with comprehensive sanitation and safety standards to ensure that families with pets can safely and easily coexist with families without pets.

URI supports the introduction of this legislation. Now that the City of New York has outlined their vital considerations, it should partner with providers and experts in related fields to develop basic minimum operational, safety and sanitation standards to help guide citywide PALS program implementation.



i <https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS>

ii <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/domesticviolence2021/index.htm>

iii <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/FINAL%202019%20Domestic%20Homicide%20Report.pdf>

iv <https://www.womenagainstabuse.org/education-resources/learn-about-abuse/why-its-so-difficult-to-leave>

v <https://urinc.org/palsreport/>

vi <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8415490/>

vii <https://urinc.org/>

viii <https://urinc.org/palsreport/>

ix <https://www.op.nysed.gov/professions/veterinarian/continuing-education>

x <https://urinc.org/palsreport/>

xi nyc.gov/site/law/public-resources/laws-of-the-city-of-new-york.page

xii https://a860-gpp.nyc.gov/concern/nyc_government_publications/9w032578s?locale=en

For more information about any of URI's programs or the recommendations above, please contact URI'S Government Affairs Team at governmentaffairs@urinc.org or 646.941.3367.

