
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
Senator Scott Wiener, Chair
2021 - 2022 Regular

Bill No:	SB 344	Hearing Date:	3/18/2021
Author:	Hertzberg		
Version:	2/9/2021		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Erin Riches		

SUBJECT: California Emergency Solutions and Housing Program: grants: homeless shelters: pets and veterinary services

DIGEST: This bill requires the state Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to establish a grant program to provide funding to homeless shelters to provide shelter, food, and basic veterinary services for pets owned by individuals experiencing homelessness, as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Defines “Housing First” to mean the evidence-based model that uses housing as a tool, rather than a reward, for recovery and that centers on providing or connecting homeless people to permanent housing as quickly as possible. Housing First providers offer services as needed and requested on a voluntary basis and that do not make housing contingent on participation in services. It includes time-limited rental or services assistance, so long as the housing and service provider assists the recipient in accessing permanent housing and in securing longer-term rental assistance, income assistance, or employment.
- 2) Establishes the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) within the Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency, with the purpose of coordinating the state’s response to homelessness by utilizing Housing First practices.
- 3) Establishes the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) under the HCFC to provide one-time grant funds to address the immediate homelessness challenges of local cities and counties.
- 4) Establishes the Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention Program (HHAPP), also under the HCFC, to build on HEAP and provide funds to help local jurisdictions combat homelessness.

- 5) Establishes the California Emergency Solutions and Housing Program (CESH) under HCD to fund a variety of activities to help individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

This bill:

- 1) Requires HCD to establish a grant program to provide qualified homeless shelters with shelter, food, and basic veterinary services for pets owned by individuals experiencing homelessness.
- 2) Requires HCD to consider whether a qualified homeless shelter was developed using a streamlined approval process.
- 3) Defines “qualified homeless shelter” as a shelter that meets all of the following conditions:
 - a) It has rules of conduct and responsibility regarding pets and their owners.
 - b) It provides crates or kenneling either near bunks or in a separate area.
 - c) It provides food for both people experiencing homelessness, and their pets.
 - d) It offers veterinarian services, including spay and neutering services.

COMMENTS

- 1) *Author’s statement.* “The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals experiencing homelessness is creating a ‘crisis within a crisis’ for our state’s most vulnerable communities. On any given night in California, at least 150,000 people are without a home. Many of these individuals refuse housing and services if doing so requires them to abandon their most treasured belonging – their pet. This happens all too often as a majority of shelters, motels, and other assisted housing programs do not permit animals on their property, pushing potential beneficiaries to live on the street. SB 344 offers a common-sense solution by building on the success of the 2019’s Pet Assistance and Support (PAS) Program, which awards grants to shelters serving the needs of both individuals experiencing homelessness, and their animal companions. By requiring HCD to provide further support for the PAS Program, we provide for individuals who otherwise would not receive essential services such as medical and living assistance, which are all the more important in the midst of this deadly pandemic.”

- 2) *Homelessness in California.* According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (the most recent report), in January 2019 California has 27% of the nation's homeless population (about 151,278 individuals). California also contains 53% of the nation's unsheltered homeless population (108,432), including people living in vehicles, abandoned buildings, parks, or on the street. Los Angeles contains the highest number of homeless people in the state, at 56,257, where 76% of those are unsheltered. People experiencing homelessness face a variety of challenges including food and income insecurity, as well as health problems; the homeless population faces a higher risk of exposure to communicable diseases such as COVID-19, influenza, strep throat, sexually transmitted diseases, Hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis, among others.
- 3) *Housing First.* The "Housing First" model is an evidence-based strategy that uses housing as a tool, rather than a reward, for recovery and centers on providing or connecting homeless people to permanent housing as quickly as possible. Housing First providers offer services as needed or voluntarily requested, and do not make housing contingent on participation in services. The federal government has shifted to a Housing First approach over the last decade, and HUD's housing programs utilize core components of this strategy. After implementing this model, chronic homelessness in the US decreased 27% between 2010 and 2016. Housing First was first embraced in California through SB 1380 (Mitchell, Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016), which requires all state housing programs to adopt this model. SB 1380 established the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) to oversee implementation of Housing First regulations and to coordinate resources, benefits, and services aimed to prevent and end homelessness in California.
- 4) *Pet friendly shelters.* The nonprofit Pets of the Homeless estimates that 5-10% of Americans experiencing homelessness have dogs or cats. Yet few shelters allow individuals to keep pets that do not qualify as service animals with them, meaning many unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness must choose between seeking shelter and keeping their pets. The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty suggests that policy changes that make accommodations for pets help bring programs into better accordance with Housing First because they help get people in the door, opening up the possibility for further services. Despite changing attitudes, however, many shelters still do not accommodate pets. The *Orange County Register* found that in 2018, only three shelters in Orange County had pet friendly policies.

The 2019 budget agreement (AB 101, Committee on Budget, Chapter 159, Statutes of 2019) included a streamlining process for low-barrier navigation

centers that allow pets to enter a shelter with an individual. Recent appropriations of state homeless funding through the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) and the Homeless Housing Assistance, and Prevention Program (HHAPP) have made low-barrier navigation centers a condition of eligibility for funding. *Moving forward, the author should consider amending this bill to require an applicant shelter to meet the definition of a low-barrier navigation center.*

- 5) *Pet Assistance and Support Program (PAS).* The 2019 budget agreement (SB 109, Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 363, Statutes of 2019) allocated \$5 million to HCD to provide shelter, food, and basic veterinarian services for the pets of individuals in homeless shelters. HCD issued a notice of funding availability (NOFA) for PAS in December 2019. PAS grants were available to cities, counties, and nonprofit corporations with a primary mission to shelter individuals experiencing homelessness and meeting the definition of “qualified shelter” (have rules of conduct and responsibility, provide crates or kenneling, provide food to both homeless individuals and their and pets, and offer veterinarian services). HCD received 49 applications, totaling \$9 million. All funding was awarded to 28 shelters in April 2020; grants were set at \$100,000 to \$200,000, depending on the applicant’s operating budget and funding gap. All grant funds must be spent by December 30, 2022. This bill would effectively make PAS a permanent program.
- 6) *How will the program be implemented?* As currently written, this bill places the new grant program within the California Emergency Solutions and Housing Program (CESH). As part of the 2017 housing package, SB 2 (Atkins, Chapter 364, Statutes of 2017) established the Building Homes and Jobs Trust Fund to fund various housing programs. SB 2 required 50% of the revenues collected in the first year (2018 calendar year) to be available to HCD to assist individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as specified. Subsequently, SB 850 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 48, Statutes of 2018) allocated half of the first-year SB 2 monies to the newly created CESH program. HCD awarded the CESH funds in two rounds, \$53 million in August 2018 and \$29 million in March 2019; the Legislature has not appropriated further funding to the program. Although a funding source for PAS is not identified in this bill, as currently written it places the program within the CESH structure.
- 7) *Committee amendments.* The author has proposed a number of technical amendments to this bill to facilitate implementation, but was unable to finalize them prior to the committee deadline. **Therefore, the committee will consider them as committee amendments.** The amendments add coauthors, and:

- a) Delete the requirement for HCD to consider whether an applicant shelter was developed using a streamlined approval process.
- b) Clarify that a “qualified homeless shelter” means a homeless shelter that meets, **or commits to meeting**, specified conditions.
- c) Authorize HCD to use up to 5% of funds appropriated for the program, for administration costs.
- d) Authorize HCD to issue forms, guidelines, and notices of funding availability to implement the program.
- e) Make PAS a stand-alone program at HCD.

RELATED LEGISLATION:

SB 234 (Wiener, 2021) — establishes the Transition Aged Youth Program under the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council, to provide grants for development of housing for transition aged youth. *This bill passed out of the Human Services Committee on a 4-0 vote and will be heard in Housing Committee in April.*

AB 71 (Luz Rivas, 2021) — establishes the Bring California Home Fund, to provide an annual funding sources with which to address homelessness. *This bill has been referred to the Assembly Committees on Housing and Community Development and Revenue and Taxation.*

SB 258 (Hertzberg, 2019) — would have required HCD to create a grant program for shelter, food, and basic veterinary services for pets in homeless shelters. *This bill was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

POSITIONS: (Communicated to the committee before noon on Friday, March 12, 2021.)

SUPPORT:

American Society for The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Best Friends Animal Society
California Catholic Conference

Feeding Pets of The Homeless
Humane Society of The United States
Mars, Incorporated
Mars Petcare
Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter
Union Station Homeless Services

OPPOSITION:

None received.

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