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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING**  
**Senator Scott Wiener, Chair**  
**2023 - 2024 Regular**

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**Bill No:** AB 1215 **Hearing Date:** 6/20/2023  
**Author:** Wendy Carrillo  
**Version:** 5/18/2023  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Alison Hughes

**SUBJECT:** Pets Assistance With Support Grant Program: homeless shelters: domestic violence shelters: pets

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

**ANALYSIS:**

*Existing law:*

- 1) Establishes the California Interagency Council on Homelessness (CalICH) - formerly 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.
- 2) Establishes the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) under the CalICH to provide one-time grant funds to address the immediate homelessness challenges of local cities and counties.
- 3) Establishes the Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention Program (HHAPP), also under CalICH, to build on HEAP and provide funds to help local jurisdictions combat homelessness.
- 4) Establishes the California Emergency Solutions and Housing Program under HCD to fund a variety of activities to help individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

**This bill:**

- 1) Requires HCD to establish the Pets Assistance with Support (PAWS) Grant Program, a grant program to provide qualified homeless shelters with shelter, food, and basic veterinary services for pets owned by individuals experiencing homelessness.
- 2) 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; and
  - d) It offers veterinary services, including, but not limited to, spaying and neutering services.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) *Author's statement.* "AB 1215 would re-establish the Pet Assistance with Support (PAWS) Program to administer and award grants to homeless and domestic violence shelters. Individuals experiencing homelessness or DV often are denied shelter if they don't surrender their pets. Studies show that pets provide comfort and help with trauma and abuse. When pets are surrendered, less than 15% are reunited, furthering depression and anxiety. The program provides food and basic veterinarian services for pets and allows pathways for permanent housing placement."
- 2) *Homelessness in California.* Based on the 2022 point in time count, California has the largest homeless population in the nation with 173,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night. Over two-thirds of those people, are unsheltered, meaning they are living outdoors and not in temporary shelters. A recent report from California 100 notes that increases in housing costs contribute to the state's homelessness crisis and notes "the rate of homelessness in California, at 40.9 per 10,000 residents, is fourth highest in the nation after Washington DC, New York, and Hawaii. More than one-quarter of people who are experiencing homelessness in the United States live in California, though the state is home to only 12% of the nation's overall population."<sup>1</sup> The report also notes that the population of people experiencing

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<sup>1</sup> <https://california100.org/app/uploads/2022/03/Housing-and-Community-Development-FOT-REPORT-Single-pages-FINAL.pdf>

homelessness has risen during the last five years while the national trend has been to see steady or decreased rates of homelessness.

- 3) *Pet friendly shelters.* The organization Pets of the Homeless estimates that 5-10% of Americans experiencing homelessness have dogs or cats.<sup>2</sup> However, homeless shelters often prohibit pets from being on the premises. As noted in a paper from Seattle University School of Law's *Homeless Rights Advocacy Project*, "pet restrictions cause people experiencing homelessness to refuse available housing and shelter because acceptance would mean giving up a family member. Ignoring the importance of pet ownership increases the risk for long-term homelessness because pet owners must wait for pet-friendly housing and services."<sup>3</sup>
- 4) *Low-barrier housing policies.* Evidence shows that people experiencing homelessness are more likely to accept temporary or interim housing if the housing is low-barrier. Typically, low-barrier housing allows for pets, allows individuals to keep their possessions, and provides non-congregate settings, with privacy. Over the last few years, state programs and policies have encouraged low-barrier shelters and navigation centers. HHAP provides funding to large cities, counties, and Continuums of Care to fund low-barrier navigation centers. In addition, AB 101 (Committee on Budget) Chapter 159, Statutes of 2019 created a streamlined, by-right process for developing low-barrier navigation centers that allow for pets, possession, and privacy. A low-barrier navigation center can be constructed more quickly by-right because the center is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.
- 5) *Pet Assistance and Support Program (PAS).* In recognition of the important role that pet-friendly shelters can provide for individuals experiencing homelessness, in 2019, the state budget included a \$5 million appropriation to create the PAS program at HCD. Under the PAS program, HCD provides grants to eligible entities for shelter, food, and basic veterinarian services for the pets of people living in homeless shelters. Eligible applicants are cities, counties, and nonprofit corporations with a primary mission to shelter individuals experiencing homelessness and meeting the definition of "qualified shelter" (i.e., they 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 issued the first notice of funding availability (NOFA) for PAS in December 2019. In the first round of the NOFA, 49 applications requesting

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.petsofthehomeless.org/about-us/#faqs>

<sup>3</sup> Aliment, Ruby; Rankin, Sara; and Lurie, Kaya, "No Pets Allowed: Discrimination, Homelessness, and Pet Ownership" (2016). *Homeless Rights Advocacy Project*. 3. <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/hrap/3>

approximately \$9 million were submitted to HCD. In April 2020, grants of either \$100,000 or \$200,000 were provided to 28 shelters, with the size of the grant proportional to the applicant's operating budget and funding gap. All grant funds had to be spent by December 30, 2022. This bill effectively makes PAS a permanent program and expands its scope to include qualified domestic violence shelters with pet-friendly policies. The 2021-22 budget included \$10 million for the PAS program. The NOFA for the latest round of the PAS program closed April 8, 2022 and a total of 70 applications were submitted for a requested \$18 million.

**RELATED LEGISLATION:**

**SB 513 (Hertzberg, 2022)** — would have required the 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. *This bill was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

**SB 344 (Hertzberg, 2021)** — would have required the 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. *This bill was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

**SB 258 (Hertzberg, 2019)** — would have required HCD, within the California Emergency Solutions and Housing Program, to develop and administer a program to award grants to qualified homeless shelters for the provision of shelter, food, and basic veterinary service for pets owned by people experiencing homelessness. *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 Wednesday, June 14, 2023.)

**SUPPORT:**

Humane Society of The United States (Co-Sponsor)  
Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (Co-Sponsor)  
PATH (People Assisting the Homeless) (Co-Sponsor)  
City of Long Beach  
City of Thousand Oaks

Housing Equality & Advocacy Resource Team (HEART)  
LA Family Housing  
Los Feliz Neighborhood Council  
Sycamores

**OPPOSITION:**

None received.

**-- END --**