

Date of Hearing: July 3, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

David Chiu, Chair

SB 258 (Hertzberg) – As Amended May 17, 2019

SENATE VOTE: 37-0

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

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to develop and administer a program to award grants to qualified homeless shelters to provide shelter, food, and basic veterinary services for pets owned by people experiencing homelessness. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Makes legislative findings regarding the number of people experiencing homelessness who have pets and the need to accommodate pets in emergency shelters.
- 2) Defines “qualified homeless shelter” to mean 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 the services of a veterinarian, including spay and neutering services.

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) Defines “supportive housing” as housing with no limit on length of stay, that is occupied by a target population, as defined, and that is linked to onsite or offsite services that assist the supportive housing resident in retaining the housing, improving his or her health status, and maximizing his or her ability to live and, when possible, work in the community
- 3) States legislative findings and declarations about homelessness, the housing shortfall and other related issues including: The Legislature finds and declares that there exists within the urban and rural areas of the state a significant number of persons without decent, safe, and sanitary housing. This shortage is inimical to the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of this state and the sound growth of its communities. Without the assistance contemplated in

existing law, it is not financially feasible for private enterprise and private investors to provide decent, safe, and sanitary emergency housing for persons who are homeless.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS

Background: California is facing a homelessness and affordable housing crisis. In 2018, on a single night in January, 129,972 people experienced homelessness in California. Twenty-four percent of the people in the nation experiencing homelessness are in California. Nearly half of all unsheltered people in the country were in California. Although the number of people experiencing homelessness decreased slightly since 2017, the overall number of people experiencing homelessness has risen over five percent since 2010.

The homeless crisis is driven by the lack of affordable rental housing for lower income people. In the current market, 2.2 million extremely low-income and very low-income renter households are competing for 664,000 affordable rental units. Of the six million renter households in the state, 1.7 million are paying more than 50% of their income toward rent. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that the state needs an additional 1.5 million housing units affordable to very-low income Californians.

Housing First Approach: Housing First is an evidence-based housing model that centers on providing people experiencing homelessness with housing as quickly as possible and then providing services as needed. A core component of Housing First includes a tenant screening process that promotes accepting applicants regardless of their sobriety or use of substances, completion of treatment, or participation in services. This model recognizes that an individual experiencing homelessness should be provided shelter and stability before underlying issues can be successfully tackled. The housing first model is contrasted with a model known as “housing readiness,” which is exhibited in some transitional housing models. This model requires homeless people to earn their way into transitional housing and make progress on certain goals; when they are deemed well enough; they earn their spot in permanent housing. The Federal government through the leadership of the US Interagency Council of Homelessness has successfully integrated the housing first approach into programs at the federal level.

Pet friendly shelters: The nonprofit Pets of the Homeless estimates that five to 10 percent of 3.5 million 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 are forced to 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 the “housing first” philosophy because they help get people in the door, opening up the possibility for further services. Despite the changing attitudes, many shelters do not accommodate pets. The Orange County Register found that in 2018 only three shelters in Orange County had pet friendly policies, with two additional pet friendly emergency shelters set to open in Anaheim in early 2019. According to the Author’s office, a survey of the 187 shelters operating in the cities of Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, and San Jose found that only 16 of the 187 shelters were pet friendly.

Aligning state priorities: This bill would require HCD to create a program to provide grants to homeless shelters that provide shelter, food, and basic veterinary services for pets owned by people experiencing homelessness. The bill does not include an appropriation and no funding was included in this year's budget for the program. This year's budget includes a streamlining process for low-barrier navigation centers that allow pets to enter a shelter with an individual. In order to better align state priorities and funding, the committee may wish to consider giving streamlined emergency shelters preferred funding from this new program.

Committee amendments: The committee may wish to consider giving priority funding from this new program to emergency shelters that are approved using a streamlined process.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Best Friends Animal Society
City of Sacramento
City of Santa Monica
City of West Hollywood
Mars Petcare
Orange County Board of Supervisors
San Diego Humane Society

Opposition

None on file

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