

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Daley Frenette 271-3042

HB 1186, relative to companion animals during a declared state of emergency.

Hearing Date: April 19, 2022

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Avard, Gray and Watters

Members of the Committee Absent : Senators Giuda and Perkins Kwoka

Bill Analysis: This bill requires shelters to accept companion animals during a declared state of emergency.

Sponsors:

Rep. Gallagher

Rep. Read

Rep. Amanda Bouldin

Who supports the bill: Representative Pearl, Merrimack-District 26, Representative Gallagher, Merrimack-District 15, Stacey Ober, American Kennel Club, Representative Read, Rockingham-District 17, Kurt Ehrenberg, Kristina Snyder, Nancy Pollard, Diane Richardson, Alvin See, Ryan Donnelly, Joan O'Brien.

Who opposes the bill: Vicki Jepson.

Who is neutral on the bill: None.

Summary of testimony presented:

Representative Gallagher, Merrimack-District 15

- This bill ensures that in the event of a disaster, people's pets will be rescued in a satisfactory fashion. The Pet Evacuation and Transportation Safety Act was passed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. There were a few gaps in that bill that this bill aims to correct. DHHS has the Disaster Animal Response Team which is supposed to be responsible for pet evacuations. Currently, they need their volunteers to be considered emergency workers so they may rescue pets effectively without having to worry about liability.
- Originally, the bill intended to keep pets and owners together, but the House Committee decided that that would not be appropriate in some situations such as shelters in a school during a disaster. Instead, the committee amended the bill so that disaster shelters must accept Disaster Animal Response Team Trailers so that pets can be kept nearby.

- The bill passed the House on consent and asked the committee to support the bill.

Representative Pearl, Merrimack-District 26

- Representative Pearl spoke in favor of the bill.
- Allowing the animal response trailers and protecting the volunteers by considering them emergency workers under RSA 21:P-41 is important.
- The House Environment and Agriculture Committee passed the bill unanimously.

Stacey Ober, American Kennel Club

- This bill would require any hotel or community shelter that shelters evacuated people during a declared state of emergency to allow disaster animal response team trailers or other reasonable accommodations on site. These will accommodate any companion animals belonging to evacuated people. Hurricane Katrina showed that people who are ordered to evacuate during an emergency sometimes refuse to do so if it means leaving their pets behind. New Hampshire has 4 trailers that are available in the event of an emergency.
- The bill also classifies people who volunteer to assist during an evacuation order with transporting people with their companion animals as emergency workers. This is needed because it is difficult to find volunteers because they would not be covered if they were injured while volunteering. This would ensure that those volunteers are covered.
- Senator Avard asked if hotels are already allowed to do this. Mrs. Ober stated that she believes there is a process where an agency does community outreach to find who would be interested in participating. They want to ensure that those who sign up understand that they would be expected to provide a place for the trailers on site. New Hampshire has a state plan in case of an emergency and DHHS handles the companion animal aspect. This bill slightly changes the existing statute so that volunteers will be considered emergency workers.