



HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

This document outlines the 2024 HASS Policy Agenda based on the results of the HASS Community Values Surveys (as of 08/10/2023), HASS Pilot Shelter intake data, and existing research on the relationship between animal welfare laws and systemic racism, classism and the resulting inequities impacting people and pets they love.

The goals of the HASS Policy Agenda are to craft and advocate for laws that will:

1. Honor the bond between people and pets, regardless of a person's or family's income by acknowledging and addressing the "root causes" of pet overpopulation, pet relinquishment, and pet "neglect" or "cruelty," which are primarily cited as pet owners' lack of access (financially or culturally) to basic resources for both themselves and their pets: food; health care; supplies; safe, stable and affordable housing; and information.
2. Acknowledge and mitigate the ways in which companion animal welfare laws and enforcement have historically and currently contributed to, and upheld, systems of racism and perpetuated racial discrimination, both intentionally and through the theory of disparate impact, in American society.
3. Create a framework for community-centric animal sheltering at the local level that positions animal services as a key component on the continuum of care for community members and is grounded in keeping pets in homes with people who love them, providing resources and support rather than punishment.
4. Acknowledge and mitigate the ways in which the historic and existing framework for animal sheltering, chronic underfunding, and the difficult conditions often found within the walls of physical animal shelters, has severely negatively impacted the welfare of both animals and people.

Using existing data and research, and grounded in the goals described, above, HASS will focus policy advocacy in 2024 on the following four issues:

Increase Equitable Access to Pet-Inclusive Housing in Well-Resourced Communities.

- A. HASS supports, and encourages local shelters and rescues to support local, state, and federal level legislation that will increase access to pet-inclusive rental housing in both market-rate and subsidized affordable housing in well-resourced and high-opportunity communities. Pet-inclusive rental housing is defined as housing that is free from breed or weight (size) restrictions and nonrefundable pet fees, including "pet rent" and up-front fees.



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B. HASS supports, and encourages local shelters and rescues to support local, state, and federal legislation that will increase funding for the provision of direct support to pet owners, including assistance paying pet rents, deposits, and up-front fees often required to secure rental housing, as well as funds to human shelters to facilitate co-shelter opportunities for people and their pets who are unhoused.

C. HASS supports, and encourages local shelters and rescues to support local, state, and federal legislation that addresses systemic racial inequity in access to safe, stable, and affordable rental housing in well-resourced, high opportunity neighborhoods.

Increase Access to Veterinary Care

HASS supports direct subsidies for low-income pet owners who need assistance covering the cost of veterinary care or access to free or reduced-cost services. HASS also encourages shelters and rescues to support the following state policy changes and areas of advocacy to increase access to veterinary care, particularly for low-income pet owners, through policy efforts meant to change and expand the veterinary field, more broadly:

- A. Veterinary Student Loan Reimbursement Programs for shelter and rescue veterinarians.
- B. Expanding Telehealth and Telemedicine options.
- C. Expanding responsibilities and duties of certain veterinary support staff
 - a. Initial establishment of Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship
 - b. Rabies vaccination without direct oversight from a licensed veterinarian
- D. Allowing shelters and rescues to treat owned pets (Texas and North Carolina) and advocating at state Veterinary Medical Associations to more strongly support opportunities for shelter and rescue veterinarians to treat owned pets (all other states).

Fee and Fine Waivers

- A. HASS supports, and encourages all shelters and rescues to support state and local policy changes to reduce or waive fees related to impoundment and redemption for all pet owners who would face financial hardship and/or be forced to relinquish their pet without a waiver or reduction in these fees.
- B. HASS supports, and encourages all shelters and rescues to support state and local policy changes that require animal shelters and staff to offer free or reduced cost services and supplies to unhouses, no-income, and low-income pet owners prior to citing and/or fining a pet owner for various violations, including those related to outdoor dogs, vaccines, spay or neuter, and at-large animals.



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Expanding SNAP Benefits to Include Pet Food

- A. HASS supports, and encourages all local shelters and rescues to support ongoing efforts to expand federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to pet food.

Human Welfare and Conditions at Animal Shelters

HASS recognizes that there is a severe mental health crisis among staff at animal shelters largely due to the difficult conditions at animal shelters, which is exacerbated by chronic underfunding of animal services. HASS supports, and encourages all local shelters and rescues to support efforts to increase animal shelter budgets, awareness of the mental health crisis in the animal sheltering community, and access to mental health support for animal shelter staff and field services officers.