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Assemblymember Ash Kalra, Social Compassion in Legislation, and a large coalition including Priscilla Presley and Katherine Heigl join forces to introduce a resolution urging action on the State’s pet overpopulation crisis

ACR 86 calls for the State to immediately fund spay and neuter and other medical services along with a public relations campaign urging Californians to adopt shelter animals, to stop unwanted litters, and for out-of-state veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians to apply for California licensure.

5/24/23, Sacramento, CA – Today, Assemblymember Ash Kalra (D-San Jose) and coauthors Senators Catherine Blakespear (D-Encinitas), Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh (R-Yucaipa), Bill Dodd (D-Napa), Monique Limon (D-Santa Barbara), Henry Stern (D-Los Angeles), Scott Wilk (R-Santa Clarita), and Assemblymembers Tasha Boerner (D-Encinitas), Bill Essayli (R-Riverside), Miguel Santiago (D-Los Angeles), Marie Waldron (R-Encinitas), Greg Wallis (R-Bermuda Dunes) and Rick Zbur (D-West Hollywood/Santa Monica) introduced ACR 86, Pet Crisis Response, which urges action on the pet overpopulation crisis in California. ACR 86 is sponsored by Social Compassion in Legislation and supported by veterinarians, shelter staff and volunteers, rescue organizations, and philanthropists and celebrities including Priscilla Presley, Katherine Heigl, Maggie Q, Dr. Gary Michelson and Louise Linton.

ACR 86 details the underlying issues that have contributed to too many dogs, cats, rabbits and other species being born in or brought into California without enough Californians willing to give them forever homes.

Many shelters in the state are at capacity and are turning away stray animals that people bring in and rejecting in-take of animals that people are trying to relinquish. Not only is this a humane issue for the animals and a public safety crisis, but it is also taking a tremendous emotional toll on shelter employees and volunteers, the rescue community, the veterinary community, and many others. The situation is also placing a gigantic burden on California taxpayers, who are paying to house, re-home and in many cases euthanize the ones not adopted or reclaimed, simply to make space.

“Our animal shelters do not have the room or resources to care for unchecked pet populations,” said **Assemblymember Kalra, lead author**. “Without greater investment in affordable spay and neuter services and veterinary staffing, this problem will only continue to



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persist, leading to diminishing shelter conditions, burnt out staff, and tens of thousands of unwanted animals struggling to survive in the streets. ACR 86 calls attention to this crisis and asks the state to begin taking the necessary steps to address deficits in our shelter system.”

Specifically, the resolution urges the Veterinary Medical Board to call for more out-of-state veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians to apply for a California license so they can immediately start providing spay and neuter surgeries and other medical services to address the pet overpopulation crisis. SCIL will also be seeking ways to remove the regulatory hurdle that prevents immediate medical relief by giving veterinarians temporary licensing reciprocity in a time of need.

The resolution also calls on the State and local municipalities to fund programs for high-volume spay and neuter services, and for the State to create an adequate funding source for ongoing spay and neuter services. Lastly, ACR 86 calls for a public relations campaign to urge Californians seeking to add a pet to their family to adopt a shelter animal and to spay and neuter all pets in their homes.

“I founded my group in 2007 to focus on the pet overpopulation crisis. We made great strides through local and state legislation, but COVID was a game changer,” **said Judie Mancuso, founder and president of Social Compassion in Legislation.** “The progress we made was erased due to a temporary spike in consumer demand for puppies, combined with shelter closures, spay and neuter providers shutting down or severely reducing their hours and access, the proliferation of “backyard” and “hobby” dog breeders trying to profit from the demand, and the public purchasing unaltered dogs from in- and out-of-state breeders versus adopting from a shelter or rescue group. All these factors contributed to a tsunami of unwanted animals which has created the crisis at hand.”

“I am delighted to express my support for the work of Social Compassion in Legislation in their efforts to substantially reduce the long-standing issue of pet overpopulation, specifically concerning dogs and cats, in the State of California. Having been actively involved in animal welfare initiatives for many years, I have personally witnessed the diverse impacts that arise from the overpopulation of pets in our communities, counties, and the state. It is my belief that we could save many millions of state, county, and city dollars to address the problem by re-allocating those dollars in early effective overpopulation control,” **said Priscilla Presley, actress and philanthropist.**

“Our approach to combating animal overpopulation has been ineffective and clearly incapable of prevention, as we tend to tackle it in a reactive manner, rather than adopting a proactive and cost-effective approach. The resolution put forth by Social Compassion in Legislation addresses the importance of prevention, which is consistently more economical than reacting after the fact. This is why I lend my full support to their cause. Our state must become as proactive in this field as it is in numerous other domains,” **Presley** added. “To make



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substantial progress in reducing overpopulation and mitigating the associated costs of animal services through the state, it is imperative that state funding expands services and enacts changes that facilitate the increased presence of veterinary professionals. For this reason, I sincerely hope that the Governor and Legislature wholeheartedly embrace this vital resolution."

"My foundation has given millions of dollars for spay and neuter surgeries in California to help mitigate the pet overpopulation problem. But private foundations cannot do it alone," said **Dr. Gary Michelson, founder of the Michelson Found Animals Foundation**. "It is time that the state steps up and helps take responsibility for this runaway problem which leads to animals suffering and their needless deaths."

"Katherine and I launched the Jason Debus Heigl Foundation Namaste Spay and Neuter Initiative to help tackle the pet overpopulation problem in California and beyond," said **Nancy Heigl, executive producer and philanthropist**. "Unfortunately, the problem is too big for private dollars alone to solve – we need the state and local governments to step up and allocate the resources needed as called for in ACR 86 if we are going to make progress."

"Having spent time on the ground in the shelters since we have come out of Covid, I will say that I have never seen a time like this. Animal overpopulation has always been an issue, but never at this level," said **Maggie Q, actress and board member of Social Compassion in Legislation**. "Not only has the stray population not come under complete control, but to compound the issue, we have backyard breeders trying to make a quick buck by breeding reasonably priced purebreds for the public - it has been a complete and utter disaster for not only the shelters, but for the rescue groups who need to relieve them."

"Yes, the shelters need more money, and truly the resources would be welcome. But I think the ultimate goal needs to come from a rethink on how we allowed this problem to escalate to this level. When I look at the rows and rows of pure-bred dogs at any given shelter in the city, it means we have a breeding regulatory issue. I am calling on any and all to come together and work on this big picture with us. Without our intervention the problem will grow, and the shoulders of our city workers, volunteers and our non-profits will break."

"One of my goals as a proud board member of Social Compassion in Legislation is to bring together the different stakeholders who are each doing their very best to tackle the pet overpopulation problem in California. That includes shelter management and staff, rescue



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organizations, policymakers, and philanthropic organizations like mine,” said **Louise Linton, actress and founder of the Louise Linton Charitable Fund, and board member of Social Compassion in Legislation.** “ACR 86 is a call to action, bringing all of these groups to work together to solve this issue in a sustainable fashion.”

“I’ve worked in the veterinary profession for 25 years, as a veterinarian for 10 years, and I have never seen anything as dire as the situation we are seeing today. The shelters I serve are full, my colleagues are breaking physically and mentally from the stress, we are afraid to take a day off knowing it might mean an animal gets killed,” said **Dr. Crystal Heath, veterinarian and founder of Our Honor.**

“This resolution is an important first step in addressing the shortage of veterinarians and veterinary staff in California. There are too many animals for us to give them the care they need, the shelters are full, and rescue groups are overburdened. The solution is clear—we must increase access to spay and neuter services, discourage breeding, and facilitate the influx of veterinarians and veterinary staff into California,” said **Dr. Daniela Castillo, founder of the Castillo Animal Veterinary.**

“Rescuers like me, who focus on farm animals, are also drowning due largely to the increased breeding of the so called “micro-pig” - a craze that gained its popularity from celebrities, social media influencers, and breeders who continue to promote the lie that there is such thing as a “mini” pig that stays under 70 pounds,” said **Simone Reyes, board member for Social Compassion.** “Once these pigs hit puberty, they grow too big for most guardians to be able to care for or find themselves living in areas not zoned for pigs. We need to double down on enforcing breeding laws. When breeding is left unchecked, it adds to the steady stream of owner surrenders. Pigs can develop behavioral issues due to being un-neutered. We are in desperate need to get the males, at the very least, fixed at the shelters so that they can be placed into responsible, loving forever homes that meet their specific needs, and stop unwanted litters that contribute to this tragic pet-pig trend.”

To support ACR XYZ and Social Compassion in Legislation’s work to save animals, please visit our website at www.SocialCompassioninLegislation.org/how-to-help/