



**SCIL**  
Social Compassion  
in Legislation

## **AB 478 (Zbur) – The FOUND Act: Friends of Oreo Uniting During Disasters**

### **THIS BILL**

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AB 478 would require cities and counties to update their emergency plans to adopt procedures for residents of evacuated areas or their representative to access the evacuated area in order to rescue any pets left behind.

The bill also directs cities and counties to set up contact information for residents who need assistance with evacuating with pets or rescuing a pet, as well as reuniting with animals found in evacuated areas.

Lastly the bill requires animals found in evacuated areas to be kept in the custody of local animal control for at least 90 days.

### **BACKGROUND**

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Current federal law requires jurisdictions to update their emergency plan every five years to be eligible for FEMA funding, while Cal OES aims to review at least ten county emergency plans per year.

The Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act of 2006 was passed at the federal level, which requires state and local emergency plans to account for the needs of pets and service animals during disasters.

Current state law requires kennel permit holders to have an evacuation plan as a condition of receiving the permit. Additionally, local emergency plans are required to include at least one evacuation shelter which allows pets.

### **PROBLEM**

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As climate change exacerbates natural disasters in California, particularly wildfires, cities and counties must plan for as many contingencies as possible and, sadly, on a more frequent basis.

During evacuations, many animals are left behind due to a variety of reasons, including owners not being at home at the time the evacuation order is given, lack of equipment needed to evacuate their animals, or difficulty in capturing the animal at the time the family needs to leave their home.

While animals are legally categorized as property, most people view them as family members and, as such, are determined to save them. Pets are our families. A 2023 Pew

Research Center survey showed that 97% of Americans believe their pet is a part of their family, with over half saying they are as much a member as a human member. These figures are even higher among women and lower income communities.

During the recent fires in Southern California, jurisdictions lacked a coordinated procedure or central authority to facilitate animal rescues, leaving volunteers and rescue groups to respond to pet owners' pleas to return to their residences, often by gaining access through unofficial means. This is not only a cruel situation for the pets, and their caring parents, but often creates more work for first responders and government officials as they must respond to the pleas for help from frustrated and desperate pet owners.

Lastly, when animals are found by animal control, it is imperative that those animals are put in an online system to give their owners the opportunity to easily find them. Additionally, these animals should not be transferred out of the area to give their owners, who often must leave the area entirely during the evacuated timeframe, enough time to return and retrieve their pet.

### **SOLUTION**

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By directing cities and counties to update their emergency plans with procedures to allow residents or their designated representative to rescue their pet from an evacuated area, AB 478 is ensuring that residents have reliable information and directions in how to go about rescuing their pet from an area under an evacuation order.

The language of the bill leaves room for local jurisdictions to craft procedures that work for their local first responders and residents, as well as create plans that are flexible under various emergency situations.

### **SUPPORT**

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Social Compassion in Legislation (sponsor)

### **CONTACT**

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