

## Help Domestic Violence Survivors and Their Animals Reach Safety

Fear for the welfare of companion animals and the lack of domestic violence shelters that can accommodate them are barriers that prevent survivors from leaving abusive situations to find safety and healing.



Source: Urban Resources Institute (URI) and the National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline) present the PALS Report and Survey: Breaking Barriers to Safety and Healing

### What would this legislation do?

Legislation is being prepared to appropriate a much-needed **\$350,000 to the Children, Youth & Families Department for FY 2024** to fund programs working to provide and support temporary safe havens for animals of domestic violence victims while they transition to safety.

### About the CARE Program

Animal Protection New Mexico's CARE (Companion Animal Rescue Effort) program offers a helpline for advocates and survivors, and assists with temporary housing and care for animals threatened by domestic violence, which has included mini-grants and direct volunteer/foster home support. CARE also provides vouchers for spay/neuter procedures, wellness exams, and vaccinations. To increase visibility and access to the program, CARE staff distribute outreach materials, give presentations and hold town halls, and work in close partnership with domestic violence shelters, directors, advocates, and the New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

CARE program staff have assisted thousands of domestic violence survivors for more than two decades.

## **2019 CARE STATS** (pre-COVID)

- Received 88 calls involving 202 animals to the helpline
- Coordinated services for 35 families with 104 animals
- Made 60 referrals to other/additional services
- Reunited 51 animals with their families after they found safety

### **Why is more funding needed?**

In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many domestic violence shelters closed temporarily and/or began operating at limited capacity. The CARE program saw a corresponding drop in cases and worked to find new ways to support clients with animals who were not able to enter shelter. Recently however—due to outreach efforts, CARE policy changes, and lifted health restrictions—CARE has seen an increase in calls (110+ in 2022, involving 160+ animals) and expects to maintain an increasing amount of client and advocate callers (still at a higher rate than before the pandemic).

**The higher number of CARE helpline callers—as well as a higher number of clients requiring veterinary care, and challenges to using foster home and transport volunteers—have all resulted in dramatically increased costs to the CARE program.**

While continuing to provide services, the CARE program has developed a new co-sheltering initiative in response to program changes and challenges and in alignment with national trends. Co-sheltering — housing people in crisis together with their companion animals in domestic violence, homeless, and other crisis shelters — is gaining traction as the way forward for helping remove barriers to survivors accessing safe shelter and healing together as a family. CARE’s initiative includes promoting co-sheltering by providing outreach, information, and financial resources for DV facilities interested in housing clients and their animals together. Currently, only 3%–12% of domestic violence shelters in the U.S. provide co-living options for survivors and their companion animals.

### **The Link between animal and human abuse.**

There are established significant correlations among animal abuse, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, elder abuse, and other forms of violence. In addition to causing pain and suffering to the animals, animal abuse can be an indicator of concurrent or future violent acts.

#### **Companion Animal Impact on Behavioral Health**

Studies show that fear for the welfare of companion animals and lack of access to companion animal resources are considerable barriers that keep many survivors from leaving abusive situations. When survivors do seek safe housing, further separation from a beloved animal companion can create sustained emotional and physical trauma leading to behavioral health impacts such as increased depression and return to substance abuse.