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Governor JB Pritzker
State Capital
207 Statehouse
Springfield, Illinois 62706

March 18, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL: governor@state.il.us

Dear Governor Pritzker:

On behalf of Best Friends Animal Society and our hundreds of thousands of members nationwide, I am writing to formally extend our support and assistance, and respectfully request that you consider a few key measures for companion animals, their owners, and animal welfare professionals in your response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Best Friends Animal Society is a leading national animal welfare organization that employs some of the nation's foremost experts in animal sheltering, and we have served as leaders in response to major national disasters such as Hurricanes Katrina and Harvey as partners to local, state and federal agencies. While the present situation puts us all in uncharted territory, much of our experience is applicable to the challenges we are already seeing and will continue to face in the coming weeks and months.

Include animal care as an exemption in any shelter-in-place policy:

Some municipalities and counties have already issued shelter-in-place orders and have included exemptions for certain animal-related needs. We urge you to ensure that if your state or any jurisdiction within your state implements such a policy, that essential animal care workers are specifically exempted. This will allow for essential staff to travel to animal shelter sites to ensure that animals receive food, water, and emergency veterinary care. We also urge you to allow people to go outside to exercise their pets as long as six feet of social distance is maintained and to leave their homes to seek veterinary care.

Ensure that essential services remain open during emergency declarations:

Animal control officers and animal shelter staff serve certain essential roles such as caring for live animals impounded in shelters as well as crucial community public safety functions such as responding to dangerous dog complaints or allegations of animal cruelty. We ask you ensure that these essential services remain active when other nonessential government functions are shut down.

Comply with requirements of federal PETS Act and include animals in emergency response:

I also want to highlight the fact that the federal PETS Act (Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act 42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq §613(g) (1988)) mandates that states, cities and counties develop emergency plans that take into consideration "the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals." This provision was enacted not only in recognition of the important role that pets play in family life but also to help ensure compliance with official public measures as many refuse to leave their pets at home and unattended, even at risk of their own lives. We urge you to ensure that the execution of emergency response plans include considerations for people quarantined, hospitalized or who are otherwise unable to care for their animals.

Include important messages about animals in your formal communications to the public:

There are several messages that are critical for the public to receive that will minimize the impact on government resources and maximize the welfare of companion animals. Most notably, it is crucial that the public understands that the World Health Organization (WHO) states there is no evidence that companion animals have been infected or could spread COVID-19. We have enclosed several suggested talking points for public information officers to use in communications to the general public.

Follow best practices for animal shelter and animal control protocols during the pandemic:

We anticipate an influx of animals surrendered to animal shelters due to human illness, economic hardship, and false perceptions that dogs and cats can contract COVID-19. We also anticipate reduced pet adoptions due to shelter closures and general restrictions on non-essential travel. Along with many other leading animal welfare professionals, we advise that shelters follow the National Animal Care and Control Association's recommendations for animal control functions during the pandemic. Please find those recommendations enclosed. Best Friends has also developed a robust suite for resources for animal shelters that are available at <https://network.bestfriends.org/lifesaving-library/covid-19-resources>.

I want to reiterate our offer to be a resource in this unprecedented time. If your office needs any guidance, assistance or information, please do not hesitate to contact our Senior Manager of Emergency Response, Sharon Hawa at sharonh@bestfriends.org or 917-842-2496.

Thank you so much in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Julie Castle, CEO

CC: Mark Ernst, State Veterinarian
CC: Scott Clarke, American Red Cross