

# ANIMALS IN DISASTERS

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(116-54)

## HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON

TRANSPORTATION AND

INFRASTRUCTURE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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FEBRUARY 12, 2020

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<sup>1</sup>Ms. MacPherson delivered an oral statement but did not submit a prepared statement.



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

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Chairman

Katherine W. Dedrick, Staff Director

Sam Graves  
Ranking Member

Paul J. Sans, Republican Staff Director

FEBRUARY 7, 2020

**SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER**

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management  
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management  
RE: Subcommittee hearing on “Animals in Disasters”

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**PURPOSE**

The Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management will meet on Wednesday, February 12, 2020, at 10:00 a.m. in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building, to receive testimony on “Animals in Disasters.” At the hearing, Members will receive testimony regarding several matters concerning animals in disasters. The Subcommittee will hear from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; the Texas A&M University Veterinary Emergency Team; and Fairfax County, Virginia’s Fire & Rescue Department, the sponsoring agency of Virginia Task Force 1, a member team of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Urban Search & Rescue System.

**BACKGROUND**

The Subcommittee has conducted significant oversight of FEMA for several years, following an increase in the volume of Presidentially-declared disasters and emergencies.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, we have observed an increase in the severity of losses from disasters, increasing Federal spending to recover from costly events, and sometimes an increase in the scale of these hazard events.<sup>2</sup>

Animals and veterinary issues are often overlooked when examining the full cycle of emergency management—planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. However, in the wake of recent disasters, there are clear challenges—for first responders and their working dogs, individuals and families and their domesticated animals, and farmers and their livestock—which go beyond existing statutory considerations and Federal assistance.

Under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), State and local governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations that serve the public generally must allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas of the facility where the public is normally allowed to go.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fema.gov/disasters/year>.

<sup>2</sup> Munich Re (2012). “Severe weather in North America—Perils Risk Insurance.” Munich, Germany: Muchener Ruckversicherungs-Gesellschaft.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, “ADA Requirements—Service Animals.” Available at [https://www.ada.gov/service\\_animals\\_2010.pdf](https://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.pdf).

*FEDERAL ASSISTANCE RELATED TO ANIMALS IN DISASTERS**FEMA—Service Animals and Pets*

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as amended, mentions pets and service animals four times.<sup>4</sup> These references reflect statutory changes resulting from the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA, P.L. 109–295) and the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006 (PETS Act, P.L. 109–308).

Post-Katrina examinations of the disaster survivor population indicated that 44% of those who failed to evacuate did so because they did not want to leave behind their pets.<sup>5</sup> Americans treat their pets as family members—in 2018, pet owners spent \$72.56 billion dollars on pet-related expenditures, nearly doubling what was spent in 2005, when Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma all made landfall.<sup>6</sup> Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma were amongst the most deadly, costly, devastating storms to date.<sup>7</sup>

PKEMRA and PETS transformed emergency management at the State and local levels, allowing not only for advance planning for evacuation plans, sheltering, and food and water for pets and service animals, but also for Federal cost-share assistance to cover related execution of these plans. Since enactment of these laws, many communities have been able to plan better and ensure that when those in harm's way are instructed to evacuate, local shelters are appropriately equipped to accommodate pets and service animals, as well.

In recent disaster events, FEMA and local emergency managers have relied on voluntary agencies and organizations to assist with both emergency veterinary services and relocation of thousands of evacuated and surrendered animals.<sup>8</sup> While many of these animals were reunited with their families following the initial disaster, there are hundreds that were not. There are currently no Federal requirements when it comes to consistent tracking of pet reunifications following disaster.

Section 1218 of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA, Division D of P.L. 115–254) authorized the establishment of one or more veterinary emergency teams at accredited colleges of veterinary medicine. The intent behind Sec. 1218 was for the veterinary team, or teams, to care for canine search teams, companion animals, service animals, livestock, and other animals; to recruit, train, and certify veterinary professionals, including veterinary students, regarding emergency response; to assist State governments, Indian tribal governments, local governments, and nonprofit organizations in emergency planning for animal rescue and care; and to coordinate with other Federal, State, local, and Indian tribal governments, veterinary and health care professionals, and volunteers. However, with regards to Section 1218, “FEMA determined that this authority is outside the scope of FEMA’s mission and duplicates capabilities already provided by HHS and USDA.”<sup>9</sup> The experiences of existing non-Federal veterinary teams active in recent disasters provide evidence that additional Federal resources are needed in this area.

*FEMA—Urban Search and Rescue System*

First established following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake,<sup>10</sup> and formally authorized in PKEMRA, FEMA manages a National Urban Search And Rescue (USAR) System, comprised of 28 task forces located across the continental United

<sup>4</sup> Stafford Act (42 U.S.C. §§5121 et seq.), Sec. 403(3)(J), Sec. 611(e)(4), Sec. 611(j)(2), and Sec. 613(g). Available at <http://bit.ly/FEMA-Stafford>.

<sup>5</sup> Fritz Institute, “Hurricane Katrina: Perceptions of the Affected.” Available at [http://www.fritzinstitute.org/PDFs/findings/HurricaneKatrina\\_Perceptions.pdf](http://www.fritzinstitute.org/PDFs/findings/HurricaneKatrina_Perceptions.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> American Pet Products Association. “Pet Industry Market Size & Ownership Statistics.” Available at [https://www.americanpetproducts.org/press\\_industrytrends.asp](https://www.americanpetproducts.org/press_industrytrends.asp).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Hurricane Center, “Costliest U.S. tropical cyclones tables update.” Available at <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/news/UpdatedCostliest.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> DomesticPreparedness.com, “Animal Relocation After Disaster—Four Cases in 2017.” Available at <https://www.domesticpreparedness.com/resilience/animal-relocation-after-disaster-four-cases-in-2017/>.

<sup>9</sup> FEMA DRRA Implementation Snapshot dated July 1, 2019 and provided to the Committee.

<sup>10</sup> The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned, The White House (Feb. 2006), available at [http://www.floods.org/PDF/Katrina\\_Lessons\\_Learned\\_0206.pdf](http://www.floods.org/PDF/Katrina_Lessons_Learned_0206.pdf).

States.<sup>11</sup> In the event of an emergency or disaster, FEMA can deploy the three closest task forces within six hours of notification and additional teams as needed.<sup>12</sup>

These task force teams are comprised of career and volunteer first responders, including firefighters, engineers, medical professionals, and canine/handler teams with specialized skillsets and training.<sup>13</sup> Urban search and rescue task forces support State and local emergency response efforts by conducting physical search and rescue operations; providing emergency medical care; assessing damage and providing feedback to local, State, and Federal officials; assessing and shutting off utilities; surveying and evaluating hazardous material threats; providing structural and hazard evaluations; stabilizing damaged structures; and carrying out search and rescue operations in a water environment.<sup>14</sup>

The canine/handler teams of the national USAR System, as well as the non-federal USAR teams, are currently not guaranteed protections like those for service animals when it comes to their commercial travel, lodging, and dining services while activated.<sup>15</sup> The Committee has heard reports that this lack of parity has resulted in challenges for some Federal teams, but also for local teams serving under Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) activations.

*U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)—Cattle, Livestock, and Poultry*

Animals impacted in disasters not only include pets, companion animals, and service animals, but also cattle, livestock, and poultry critical to farming communities. The potential impacts related to managing livestock in the planning for, response to, and recovery from disasters can be significant given the potential impact on State, local, tribal, and territorial economies. For example, agriculture, food, and related industries represented 5.4% of the Nation's gross domestic product or \$1.053 trillion in 2017.<sup>16</sup> Cash receipts for animals and related products in 2018 was over \$176 billion.<sup>17</sup> More broadly, the impact could include the Nation's food supply depending on the severity of the disaster.

As with other animals, planning for livestock in disasters includes evacuation plans, sheltering, and food and water.<sup>18</sup> However, preparedness for and response to impacts on livestock has its own unique challenges. For example, mitigating against and responding to large scale animal mortality post-disaster is critical to public health and safety. Livestock, cattle, poultry, and other large animals, in the context of farms and agriculture, typically involve a high number of animals that must be managed in developing preparedness and response plans. For example, while small pets may be more easily accommodated during evacuations, the solutions for herds of cattle may be to shelter in place.

There are a number of disaster assistance programs available through the USDA such as: the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP); the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP); the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP); and the Emergency Loan Program (EM). The LFP, LIP, and ELAP were all first authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill and reauthorized in 2018.<sup>19</sup>

The LFP provides compensation to eligible livestock producers that have suffered grazing losses due to drought or fire on land that is native or improved pastureland with permanent vegetative cover or that is planted specifically for grazing.<sup>20</sup> LFP

<sup>11</sup> FEMA, National Urban Search & Rescue Response System: Task Force Locations, available at <http://www.fema.gov/task-force-locations>.

<sup>12</sup> Federal Emergency Management Agency, National Urban Search and Rescue Response System Operations Manual, (September 2012), available at <http://www.usarcd.org/forms/manuals/Operations%20Manual%202012-001.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-16-87, Disaster Response: FEMA Has Made Progress Implementing Key Programs, but Opportunities for Improvement Exist 5-6 (2016).

<sup>14</sup> FEMA, Urban Search & Rescue Participants, available at <https://www.fema.gov/urban-search-rescue-participants>.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Justice, "Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in State and Local Government Services" 75 Fed. Reg. 56164 (September 15, 2010). Available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2010-09-15/pdf/2010-21821.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> USDA, Economic Research Service, using data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Value Added by Industry series. Available at <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/ag-and-food-sectors-and-the-economy/>

<sup>17</sup> USDA, Economic Research Service, Farm Income and Wealth Statistics, November 27, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> "Do You Have a plan for Your Livestock Should Disaster Strike?" USDA Preparedness Factsheet, October 2016; *See also* "Large animals and livestock in disasters," American Veterinary Medical Association. <https://www.avma.org/resources/pet-owners/emergencycare/large-animals-and-livestock-disasters>.

<sup>19</sup> P.L. 110-246; *see also* P.L. 115-334.

<sup>20</sup> USDA, Livestock Forage Disaster Program Factsheet, July 2019. Available at [https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2019/livestock\\_forage\\_disaster\\_program-fact\\_%20sheet\\_july-2019.pdf/](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2019/livestock_forage_disaster_program-fact_%20sheet_july-2019.pdf/).

payments for drought are equal to 60 percent of the monthly feed cost for up to 5 months, depending upon the severity of the drought. LFP payments for fire on Federally managed rangeland are equal to 50 percent of the monthly feed cost for the number of days the producer is prohibited from grazing the managed rangeland, not to exceed 180 calendar days.<sup>21</sup> There is a \$125,000 annual payment limit for payments under this program.<sup>22</sup> LFP activity in FY 2018 included 89,332 payments totaling \$487,454,684.<sup>23</sup>

The LIP provides benefits to livestock producers for livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by adverse weather or by attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the Federal government. LIP payments are equal to 75 percent of the average fair market value of the livestock. It also provides benefits for the sale of animals at a reduced price if the sale occurred due to injury that was a direct result of an eligible adverse weather event or due to an attack by an animal reintroduced into the wild. There is no longer a payment limit on assistance provided under this program. During FY 2018, LIP activity included 4,792 payments totaling \$36,615,003.<sup>24</sup>

The ELAP provides emergency assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease (including cattle tick fever), adverse weather, or other conditions, such as blizzards and wildfires, not covered by LFP and LIP. As with LIP, there is no longer a payment limit on assistance provided under this program. During FY 2018 ELAP activity included 3,770 payments totaling \$47,064,049.<sup>25</sup>

While these assistance programs are available through USDA, there remain gaps in planning and assistance for animals in disasters.<sup>26</sup>

#### *USDA—Animal Welfare Act*

The Animal Welfare Act (AWA, P.L. 89–544) was signed into law in 1966. It is the only Federal law in the United States that regulates the treatment of animals in research, exhibition, transport, and by dealers. Other laws, policies, and guidelines may include additional species coverage or specifications for animal care and use, but all refer to the AWA as the minimum acceptable standard.<sup>27</sup>

Under the AWA, certain facilities are Federally licensed. There is currently no Federal requirement for facilities holding an AWA license to have emergency or disaster plans in place. This puts animals in these facilities—and the responders who take action to rescue them—at particular risk. During both Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy, thousands of animals in AWA-licensed facilities perished due to flood.<sup>28</sup>

#### WITNESS LIST

- Wesley T. Bissett, DVM, PhD, Director, Veterinary Emergency Team, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, Texas A&M University
- R. Douglas Meckes, DVM, State Veterinarian, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, State of North Carolina
- Teresa MacPherson, Canine Handler, Fire and Rescue Department/Virginia Task Force 1, Fairfax County, VA
- Richard Patch, Vice President, Federal Affairs, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)

<sup>21</sup> Id.

<sup>22</sup> Id.

<sup>23</sup> President’s FY2020 Budget Request, USDA Farm Service Agency Congressional Justification. Available at <https://www.obpa.usda.gov/24fsa2020notes.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Id.

<sup>25</sup> Id.

<sup>26</sup> Heath SE, Linnabary RD, “Challenges of Managing Animals in Disasters in the U.S. Animals,” Published 2015 Mar 26, US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.

<sup>27</sup> “Animal Welfare Act,” USDA National Agriculture Library, available at <https://www.nal.usda.gov/awic/animal-welfare-act>.

<sup>28</sup> Slate, “Sandy’s Toll on Medical Research.” Available at <https://slate.com/technology/2012/11/animals-drowned-in-sandy-nyu-medical-research-is-set-back-years-by-dead-laboratory-mice.html>; see also The Hill, “The PREPARED Act will protect vulnerable animals when disaster strikes,” available at <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/462453-the-prepared-act-will-protect-vulnerable-animals-when-disaster>.





## ANIMALS IN DISASTERS

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2020

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC  
BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT,  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m. in room 2167, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Dina Titus (Chairwoman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. TITUS. We will call this hearing to order.

I ask unanimous consent that the chair be authorized to declare recesses during today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that Members not on the subcommittee be permitted to sit with the subcommittee at today's hearing and ask questions.

Without objection, so ordered.

I guess that means that Beau and Remy are allowed to stay.

[Laughter.]

Ms. TITUS. So thank you two for coming.

This morning we are going to be discussing an issue of great importance to me, and I think to the country, when it comes to emergency preparedness and response, and that is animal welfare in disasters.

Eighty-five million families in the United States have at least one pet. That is nearly 67 percent of all households in the country. These pets, these animals, are like members of our family, and their safety has a major impact on how people prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

[Slides shown during Hon. Titus' opening statement.]

Ms. TITUS. The issue of caring for animals in emergencies is not a new concern. In fact, we can look to many of the world's oldest cultures and religions for the first evidence of emergency planning for animals in disasters. In Genesis, we find the story of Noah and the great flood. In it God directs Noah to gather up two of each animal onto the ark to save them from the impending flood.

So, whether it is a family cat, a service animal, the cattle on your ranch, or a working dog alongside a first responder, when we take care of these animals during a disaster, it makes it easier for people to be willing to evacuate, and then later to begin the process of recovery.

And speaking of evacuation, in fact there was a study done after Katrina that showed, of those who failed to evacuate, 44 percent

stated that it was because they didn't want to leave their pets behind.

So today we will explore existing authorities in the Stafford Act that help guide FEMA's work in this space, and the assistance it provides to States and localities. We will examine gaps in Federal emergency management policy that have led to families' separation from their pets, and the deaths of tens of thousands of animals.

We will also hear from groups providing services outside of the Stafford framework, and hear about opportunities where the Federal Government could promote animal welfare and help alleviate these separations and losses.

I will note that, in the recently passed Disaster Recovery Reform Act, known as DRRRA, we included language to establish veterinary response teams, utilizing the expertise of our Nation's unsurpassed higher education veterinary programs.

The provision, section 1218, is the next step in a progression of public policy developed in response to animal-related challenges dating back to the early 1990s and Hurricane Andrew. They have, unfortunately, continued to be an issue in large- and small-scale events, such as Hurricane Katrina, Rita, Wilma, Florence, Harvey, Irma, Maria, and Michael, Superstorm Sandy, and the recent California wildfires.

However, much to my dismay, FEMA has so far chosen to ignore this provision. During the last 5 years alone, our Nation has experienced nearly 500 Presidentially declared disaster events, including, as I have listed, significant hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and earthquakes. In each of these instances, we have repeatedly seen the challenges that come with the Federal response to disaster when tens of thousands were rescued and evacuated, some reunited, but some lost.

Prussian-German philosopher Kant famously said, "We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals." So let us be judged today by what we can accomplish to protect animals in disasters.

So today's hearing will provide this subcommittee with an opportunity to examine whether our Federal emergency management policies measure up to our Nation's affection for our pets and our flocks.

I want to thank our witnesses who are here today; we look forward to your discussion. And I also thank other animal groups, including the Humane Society, that have helped us to work on this issue.

[Ms. Titus' prepared statement follows:]

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**Prepared Statement of Hon. Dina Titus, a Representative in Congress from the State of Nevada, and Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management**

This morning we are discussing an issue of great importance when it comes to emergency preparedness and response and that is animal welfare in disasters.

Eighty-five million families in the United States have at least one pet.

That's nearly 67 percent of all households in this country.

These animals are members of our families, and their safety has a major impact on how people prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

The issue of caring for animals in emergencies is not a new concern.

In fact, we can look to many of the world's oldest cultures and religions for the first evidence of emergency planning for animals in disasters.

In Genesis, we find the story of Noah and the Great Flood. In it, God directs Noah to gather two of each animal on the Ark to save them from the impending flood.

Whether it is a family cat, a service animal, the cattle on your ranch, or a working dog alongside a first responder, when we take care of animals during a disaster, it makes it easier for people to be willing to evacuate and then later to begin the process of recovery.

Today we will explore existing authorities in the Stafford Act that help guide FEMA's work in this space and the assistance it provides to states and localities.

We'll examine gaps in federal emergency management policy that have led to family separation from their pets and the deaths of tens of thousands of animals.

We will also hear from groups providing services outside of the Stafford framework, and hear about opportunities where the federal government could promote animal welfare and help alleviate these separations and losses.

I'll note that in the recently passed Disaster Recovery and Reform Act, also known as DRRRA, we included language to establish veterinary response teams utilizing the expertise of our nation's unsurpassed higher-ed veterinary programs.

This provision—Section 1218—is the next step in a progression of public policy developed in response to animal-related challenges dating back to the early 1990s and Hurricane Andrew.

They have unfortunately continued to be an issue in small- and large-scale events such as Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Wilma, Florence, Harvey, Irma, Maria, and Michael; Superstorm Sandy; and the recent California wildfires.

Much to my dismay, FEMA has so far chosen to ignore this important provision.

During the last five years alone, our nation has experienced nearly 500 Presidentially-declared disaster events, including significant hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and earthquakes.

In each of these instances, we have repeatedly seen challenges that come with a federal response to disasters, when tens of thousands of animals were rescued, evacuated, and—hopefully—reunited with their owners.

Prussian-German philosopher Immanuel Kant famously said, “We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.”

Today's hearing provides the Subcommittee with an opportunity to examine whether our Federal emergency management policies measure up to our nation's affection for our pets and our flocks.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today and look forward to today's discussion.

Ms. TITUS. I would now like to call on the ranking member of the subcommittee, Mr. Meadows, for his opening statement.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Chairwoman Titus. Thank you for your leadership. And I thank all the witnesses for being here today.

Obviously, examining the issues of animals in disasters is not only an important topic for preparing and responding to disasters, but, as we all know, animals play a unique role in terms of the resources following a disaster: aiding in search and rescue, serving people with disabilities, necessary to individuals' livelihood in the agricultural community, or, even as many Americans feel today, pets are truly part and members of their family.

All of those variations of animals in disaster situations present unique challenges and opportunities for the Federal Government aiding in all phases of disaster response and recovery.

Particularly today I am pleased to have a witness from my home State of North Carolina, Dr. Meckes, who serves as the State veterinarian.

Thank you for being here. You know very well what it is like to deal with these issues, having a number of storms hit North Carolina. And so, whether it is from small household pets to larger animals in the agricultural community, they provide unique challenges. So I look forward to hearing your expertise today.

I also want to go a little bit further, because we are going to focus on the critical issue of saving lives and helping communities rebuild smarter and faster after a disaster. Addressing these challenges related to animals is also important.

The canines and their handlers in the search-and-rescue teams are critical to saving lives. My son actually has trained a chocolate lab that is actually not only a companion, but part of the family, and they travel everywhere together. And you can mess with the dad, but you can't mess with his dog. So ensuring their proper care while engaged in search-and-rescue missions also is critically important so that we don't put them in harm's way.

In rural communities, as I mentioned earlier, livestock is critical to State and local economies, and ultimately to the Nation's food supply. Effective preparedness and planning for response and recovery must include how we plan for and manage animals in these areas hit by disasters. I know that in the hurricane in North Carolina we were having to bring in boxcars to try to move some of the livestock that potentially was in harm's way.

And so I look forward to hearing from all of you today as we look at this issue and how we can address best practices, where we can do better, and I thank you all for being here, and I yield back to the chairwoman.

[Mr. Meadows' prepared statement follows:]

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**Prepared Statement of Hon. Mark Meadows, a Representative in Congress from the State of North Carolina, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management**

Examining the issue of animals in disasters is an important topic in preparing for and responding to disasters.

Animals play unique roles as they can be resources following a disaster: aiding in search and rescue, serving people with disabilities, necessary to individuals' livelihood in the agricultural communities, or even as many Americans feel today—pets that are truly members of the family. All of those variations of animals in disaster situations present unique challenges and opportunities for the federal government aiding in all phases of disaster response and recovery.

Particularly today, I am pleased to have a witness from my home state of North Carolina, Dr. Meckes, who serves as the State Veterinarian. I look forward to hearing about how North Carolina has handled animal response during the several disasters that have hit our state over the past few years.

While we focus on the critical issues of saving lives and helping communities rebuild smarter and faster after a disaster, addressing the challenges related to animals is important.

The canines and their handlers in our search and rescue teams are critical to saving lives. Ensuring their proper care while engaged in search and rescue missions ensures those operations are effective.

In rural communities, livestock is critical to the state and local economies and, ultimately, to the Nation's food supply.

Effective preparedness and planning for response and recovery must include how we plan for and manage animals in areas hit by disaster. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about best practices and where we can do better.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Meadows. Other Members will come and go, but for now we will just move on to our witnesses. And I would like to welcome you all and thank you for being here. You are truly the experts in this area, and we look forward to your testimony.

Dr. Wesley Bissett, who is here, he is the director of the veterinary emergency team, College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M.

Dr. Douglas Meckes, the State veterinarian for the Department of Agriculture in the State of North Carolina.

Teresa MacPherson, who is a canine search specialist with the Fire and Rescue Department, Virginia Task Force 1, Fairfax County, Virginia.

And Mr. Richard Patch, who is vice president, Federal affairs, for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Thank you very much for being here today. We all look forward to hearing what you have to advise us.

And without objection, our witnesses' full statements will be included in the record.

Since your written testimony has already been made a part of the record, the subcommittee requests that you limit your testimony to 5 minutes.

So we will proceed with Dr. Bissett.

**TESTIMONY OF WESLEY T. BISSETT, D.V.M., PH.D., DIRECTOR, TEXAS A&M VETERINARY EMERGENCY TEAM, TEXAS A&M COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE AND BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES; R. DOUGLAS MECKES, D.V.M., STATE VETERINARIAN, NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES; TERESA MACPHERSON, CANINE SEARCH SPECIALIST, FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT/VIRGINIA TASK FORCE 1, FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA; AND RICHARD PATCH, VICE PRESIDENT, FEDERAL AFFAIRS, AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS**

Dr. BISSETT. Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Member Meadows, Vice Chairwoman Fletcher, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify regarding the impact of disasters on animals. My name is Dr. Wesley Bissett, and I am the director of the Texas A&M Veterinary Emergency Team at the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine.

All too often disaster impacts on animals and their owners are seen as separate issues. But, as you will hear from my testimony, they are one and the same, and must be looked at in that manner. Human health, well-being, and safety is always the highest priority in disaster settings. And I am not here to testify that animals should be given equal priority. The reality is, however, that people will factor in their animals when deciding how to respond to a threat, and many will make decisions that are not in their best interests if their animals are not provided for.

And an example is provided by a woman from the coast of Texas who refused to evacuate prior to Hurricane Ike. She had had a knee replacement, lived in an elevated house, and had an elderly dog, could not carry it down the flight of stairs. She did not know that help was available. And unfortunately, she was identified by the serial number on her knee replacement hardware across the bay, and about 6 miles from her home. That was shared with me by an official in Chambers County. That is the county in which her body was found.

As the director of the Texas A&M VET, I have experienced just how intertwined the human and animal condition is. Through our response to numerous disasters in Texas, and to the Camp wildfire in Paradise, California, we have experienced those times when victims are reunited with their animals. These are powerful interactions that I believe provide one of the first opportunities for their recovery. A common phrase that I hear during these interactions is, “Doc, everything is going to be OK.” It is often the first time these people tell their stories, and realize that they can indeed take a step toward a renewed future. So it is a matter of hope.

I would further argue that the highest priority—human health, well-being, and safety—can never be fully addressed without addressing the animal condition.

Agricultural animals have the additional distinction of also being economically important species. Animal ag losses for Hurricane Harvey in Texas was estimated at \$93 million. That is a huge number at the State level. But think, what does it mean on a finer scale? A family farm’s losses reflect the loss of years of hard work, and threaten their ability to recover their operations and feed their families. This escalates, as you have multiple producers that are impacted, particularly in communities whose economic basis is derived from the agricultural sector. It threatens recovery at the community level, and persists well beyond the time when all the debris has been cleared.

Solving these problems is complex and, quite frankly, beyond what many local and even State governments can accomplish.

I would also argue that the current approach to Federal level support, particularly in the veterinary medical arena, is insufficient, as well.

The Texas A&M VET was formed in 2010, with the charge of providing a holistic approach to the animal problem in our State. We have fulfilled this charge through working in four domains grounded in veterinary medicine.

First, we provide direct support for development of local-level, animal-focused emergency plans, and also by developing mitigating strategies for animal-based entities.

Second, we provide veterinary medical support to local communities in response to natural and man-made disasters.

Third, our team supports Texas Task Force 1 and other members of the USAR network that train in and are deployed to Texas. We have an aggressive approach for dealing with search-and-rescue dog issues that is based in prevention and recovery. Texas Task Force 1 estimates that we increase the operational time of search dogs by at least 50 percent. And that is significant, because that is also hope for the person that is lost.

Fourth, our senior vet students participate in all of our activities. This augments immediate operational capacities, and also builds capacity for the future. The Disaster Recovery Reform Act authorized FEMA to establish national veterinary emergency teams at colleges of veterinary medicine. This provides an opportunity for teams like ours to be an immediate Federal resource, and for new teams to be built.

The programs I have described above represent a significant advancement over veterinary medical disaster response assets that are currently in the Federal inventory.

In closing, I would like to thank you again for inviting me to testify. I appreciate the committee's commitment to ensuring that the highest priority, human health, well-being and safety, is fully addressed by also addressing the animal issue.

[Dr. Bissett's prepared statement follows:]

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**Prepared Statement of Wesley T. Bissett, D.V.M., Ph.D., Director, Texas A&M Veterinary Emergency Team, Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences**

Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Member Meadows, Vice Chairwoman Fletcher, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify regarding the impact of disasters on animals and their owners. All too often, the impact of disasters on animals and owners are seen as separate issues, but as you will hear from my testimony, they are one in the same and must be looked at in that matter. My name is Dr. Wesley Bissett and I am the Director of the Texas A&M Veterinary Emergency Team (VET) at the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

The Texas A&M VET was formed at the request of the Texas Division of Emergency Management in 2010 to provide the State of Texas with a robust and deployable veterinary medical capability. The Texas A&M VET has deployed to all major disasters and numerous smaller-scale incidents that have occurred in our state since that time. The Texas A&M VET has been a key contributor to the state response effort on behalf of resident animals across a wide array of incident types including wildfires, explosions, hurricanes, floods, and the 2014 Dallas, Texas Ebola virus incident. We have also been active through our integration with Texas Task Force 1, one of the 28 FEMA Urban Search and Rescue Teams, through our provision of veterinary medical support to canine assets attached to the team. The Texas A&M VET has in addition developed subject matter expertise in the area of emergency preparedness and are key members in our state's animal focused emergency planning efforts down to the local level.

ANIMAL ISSUES

"All hazards emergency plans" is a common mantra in the emergency management discipline. I would argue that the mantra needs to be "all hazards and all species" as animals are impacted in virtually all disaster scenarios. The State of Texas has had ample opportunity to learn this lesson given the many disasters that have occurred in our state, with one of the most recent being Hurricane Harvey in 2017. Human health, well-being, and safety is always the highest priority in emergency and disaster situations and I am not here to testify that animals should be given equal priority. The reality is however, that people will factor in their animals when deciding how to respond to a threat and many will make decisions that are not in their own best interest if their animals are not provided for. An example is provided by an elderly woman who refused to evacuate from Bolivar Peninsula in Texas prior to Hurricane Ike in 2008. She had recently had a knee replacement and would not leave her home prior to landfall due to her inability to carry her elderly dog down a flight of stairs. She did not realize help was available and was unfortunately identified by the serial number on her knee replacement hardware which was found approximately 6 miles and across the bay from her home. A more current example is provided by the 2019 novel *Coronavirus* incident unfolding before us. I am aware of a person who refused evacuation from Wuhan, China because their animal could not be evacuated with them.

I, as a veterinarian, believe that animals are inherently worthy of an effective disaster response. As the Director of the Texas A&M VET, I, along with our team members have experienced just how important animals are to the human victims of a disaster. The reality of a human disaster victim is that it is someone who may have lost a home, a loved one, or a friend. They may be facing a tremendous sense of financial insecurity due to destruction of their place of employment, a bleak outlook for income generation, and the high costs of recovery. The reality is that our pets, our animals, our livestock are an important source of comfort and yes, security. These lessons have come through the many times that we have been involved

in addressing disaster-related animal injuries and illnesses on behalf of their owners and when we are involved with reuniting an owner and animal that had been separated by disaster conditions. These are powerful interactions that I believe provide one of the first opportunities for recovery of disaster victims. A common phrase that I hear during these interactions is “Doc, everything is going to be okay.” The reunion with their beloved pet or even herd of livestock is often the first time these people tell their stories and recognize that they can take a step forward to a renewed future. These situations are moments that I and other VET members will forever cherish. They illustrate that we, the Texas A&M VET, in addition to being in the business of veterinary medicine, are in the business of hope. I would argue that hope is a tremendous commodity to be brought into a community impacted by a disaster. I would further argue that the highest priority, human health, well-being, and safety, can never be fully addressed without addressing the animal condition.

This role that animals play in our lives transcends the different species of animals. Household pets, in today’s society, are often considered part of the family and the emotional bonds are strong. Emotional ties also exist for agricultural animals and while these animals are managed for profit and introduction into the human food supply, their care-givers have a tremendous emotional and psychological commitment to the health and well-being of the animals under their care. We have experienced the same expressions of hope when we have reunited ranchers and their cattle.

Agricultural animals have the additional distinction of being economically important species. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Economic Unit estimated Hurricane Harvey agricultural animal losses at \$93 million dollars. This is significant at the state level, but what does it mean on a finer scale? The loss of agricultural animals can most certainly be devastating to family operations. This loss is most certainly financial, but may also represent the loss of a lifetime or even generations of effort and genetic selection. An individual producer’s losses reflect the loss of years of hard work and potentially threatens the ability to recover their operation and feed their family. The cost of lost agricultural animals escalates as multiple producers are impacted, particularly in communities whose primary economic base is derived from the agricultural sector. In these communities, lost agricultural income is multiplied across all of the businesses that provide services to animal agriculture producers. This can threaten recovery at the community level and persist well after the houses are rebuilt and roads are repaired.

The need to consider and have resources capable of responding to animal issues exists throughout the disaster timeline spanning evacuation, rescue, veterinary medical care, sheltering, and reunification. These all require significant planning and development of resources, both of which may be beyond what can be provided in jurisdictions across the country. Our experience has been that many communities struggle to identify professionals with appropriate levels of animal-related and emergency management experience to develop effective animal-focused emergency plans. This is exacerbated due to the paucity of jurisdictional employees engaged in animal-related activities. Animal-related expertise employed by jurisdictions is typically limited to animal control officers, livestock officers and extension agents.

The reality is that most jurisdictions struggle to provide adequate staffing and leadership for all emergency functions required for an effective animal-focused response. Animal response, as with other areas of emergency response, necessarily extends into the non-governmental arena. The challenge is that there are no underlying standards that apply to all involved and therefore no standardized foundation from which to build an effective response. There are also differences in agendas or underlying beliefs that make a cohesive response difficult. Our experience has been that there may often be differences between Animal Control Services and local non-governmental animal shelter or rescue groups. These differences are understandable given that there are differences in the underlying missions of these types of organizations. Neither are wrong; they are just different. We have seen similar difficulties when rural-based and urban-based units operate in the same disaster theater. There are often differences in what is considered acceptable when viewed from the lens of very different experiences and also differences in thought of what should be done for household pets versus livestock. This issue is compounded by most jurisdictions having budgetary limitations on what they can invest on behalf of animals. The end result is that the local response, particularly in larger scale disasters, falls short on providing for animals and therefore incompletely serves the highest priority of human health, well-being and safety.

The role of veterinary medicine in emergency management is worthy of additional discussion. Local jurisdictions typically employ few, if any, veterinarians. This drives veterinary medical support into the private sector. The veterinary medical in-



dustry is still predominantly one driven by small businesses. It has also evolved to a point where more veterinarians are focusing on household pets rather than livestock. The Texas A&M VET experience is that most jurisdictions cannot pay for veterinary medical services provided in a disaster setting due to their not having the budgetary capacity for entering into veterinary service agreements. This is exacerbated for agricultural animal-related expenses given that they are expressly excluded from Stafford Act provisions addressing reimbursement of animal-related costs. The end result is that veterinarians are often expected to participate as volunteers with their business centers often being the epi-center of veterinary medical operations.

It is important to note that this is not just a person volunteering. Veterinarians, to be effective, must have the “tools of the trade.” To make the point, would you expect a fireman to extinguish an apartment fire with a garden hose? In the case of veterinarians, the equipment, supplies, and pharmaceuticals are expensive, yet necessary and critical. Performing emergency operations in their place of business also interferes with their ability to recover their businesses and resume the process of income generation. They are also typically not trained to be in the disaster theater. Disaster conditions are often exceedingly hazardous and emergency operations complex. These two issues make it exceedingly difficult for veterinarians to commit to being a component of emergency operations. The 2011 Bastrop, Texas Complex Wildfire provides an excellent example. Two veterinary practices, one small animal and one mixed, participated on behalf of their county prior to the Texas A&M VET being deployed to the area. They estimated their financial losses associated with the response in the six-figure range. This was compounded by the shrinkage of their client pool after the disaster. An additional example is provided by a Large Animal veterinarian in coastal South Texas. He participated on behalf of his county during Hurricane Harvey in 2017. Recent personal conversations with this veterinarian revealed that he will not be participating in the future. Reasons expressed included significant financial investments with no reimbursement, lost ability to generate income for a period of approximately 45 days, and a lack of training for working in the hazards of the post-disaster environment.

The result of the issues described above is predictable. There are many people and organizations who are passionate about animals yet very inexperienced in emergency management. Many of these individuals and groups are willing to self-deploy into a disaster area. This creates numerous issues. They rarely have the ability to be self-sustaining in terms of re-supply of necessary supplies or providing for themselves and quickly become another problem for the jurisdiction to manage.

The lack of integration also results in the disposition of animals that are not consistent with the desires of the local government and citizens. Most local governments are committed to providing for their citizen’s animals, with reunification of animals and the appropriate owner a priority. This is a complicated mission-tasking that requires a highly organized approach where knowing where the animals were rescued is key.

The Texas A&M VET has witnessed self-deployed animal rescue groups simply remove animals from, for example, flood waters and deposit them on the most convenient high spot with no documentation of location of rescue. They have failed to deliver the animals to the sanctioned animal shelter. Our team has also witnessed the removal of household pets and livestock from safe locations where the animals were being sheltered in place.

The end result of the issues discussed above is that animals of all species are not able to be reunited with their owners. There is a perception that I believe to be true, that many animals are rapidly removed from the disaster area, in some cases to out of state locations. The consequences are two-fold; a family or producer is not reunited with their animals and there is the potential for spread of disease to new areas. Heartworm disease is perhaps the best example of the latter issue.

#### TEXAS A&M VETERINARY EMERGENCY TEAM

The Texas A&M VET was formed and officially incorporated into the State of Texas emergency management infrastructure so that the human priority can be fully addressed through dealing with the animal issue. The Texas A&M VET is comprised of faculty veterinarians, staff, and senior veterinary medical students from the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences and veterinary medical professionals from the private sector. The VET is focused on providing holistic solutions for the human-animal issue and is active in all phases of emergency management. Senior veterinary medical students at the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences participate in all VET activities. This augments immediate operational capacities and also builds capacity for the fu-

ture. The Texas A&M VET will have educated approximately 1,400 veterinary medical professionals in the emergency management discipline by the end of this academic year. Ours is a capacity building effort.

The Texas A&M VET also builds animal-focused capacities through providing critically needed animal-focused emergency planning support at the state and local level. The team works at the community level to make sure local jurisdictions have effective animal evacuation, rescue, veterinary medical support, decontamination, and sheltering tactical plans in place. This direct planning assistance is provided at no cost to the community and provides a unique educational opportunity in the veterinary medical educational arena with ours being the only program of this type in the country. The VET is also the primary provider of Secure Food Supply planning efforts in the State of Texas. In 2019 alone, the team provided enhanced biosecurity planning expertise for concentrated animal feeding operations in the Texas Panhandle. The operations for which we developed enhanced biosecurity plans controlled in excess of 220,000 animals. The 2020 VET planning schedule will see the team develop plans for an additional 300,000 animals in the Secure Food Supply planning arena as well as a full suite of animal-focused tactical plans for numerous Texas counties.

The Texas A&M VET response activities are typically centered in providing veterinary medical assistance for search and rescue canines and a wide range of mission taskings for resident animals. The Texas A&M VET developed a collaborative partnership with Texas Task Force 1, one of the 28 USAR teams, shortly after inception. Our role is to manage all of the veterinary medical issues that arise during in-state deployments. Search and rescue canines are a key component of the search and rescue effort. The canine search and rescue mission is a highly demanding job defined by strenuous physical exertion in difficult environments. The canines wore trackers in the 2014 Wimberly, Texas flash-flood response and were tracked at covering approximately 13 miles per day in a river-bottom environment. Exertion and wear and tear associated with search operations had the potential to reduce the operational times that the dogs could operate.

The Texas A&M VET focuses on the recovery process at the end of the dog's operational period and through these efforts keeps the dogs working. The team's management of search and rescue dogs includes laser therapy, preventive therapy, and pharmacological intervention. Texas Task Force 1 has reported that the efforts of the VET extends the intra-deployment operational lifespan of the search dogs by at least 50 percent. The reality is that keeping these dogs working provides hope for those that are lost. This is all made possible through a focused commitment of VET members to become search and rescue dog experts as well as investments in medical platforms designed to facilitate treatment and care of the dogs.

The Texas A&M VET also provides support for resident animals throughout the disaster timeline. The team has mission ready packages (MRP) for each phase of the disaster cycle. These include an Animal Evacuation MRP, Animal Shelter Incident Management Team MRP, and veterinary medical support MRPs that are scaled to the demands of the incident being responded to. The suite of Texas A&M VET MRPs provides a holistic approach for dealing with animal-related disaster issues.

Hurricane Harvey provides one of the best examples of the capabilities of the Texas A&M VET. The team deployed with Texas Task Force 1 during the pre-land-fall period to provide veterinary medical support for search and rescue dogs. As the storm made landfall and moved up the coast we were tasked with providing veterinary medical assistance and emergency animal shelter support for local jurisdictions. The VET was ultimately assigned to 10 Texas counties across a 400 mile operational theater. The VET's operational platform design and approach to planning and exercising allowed the team to provide veterinary medical support in an organized and highly efficient manner. In the words of Dr. Jimmy Tickle, formerly with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, "VET operations were a model for the nation." The Texas A&M VET provided direct support for 4,000 animals in this deployment. This number escalates significantly when considering that many interventions were performed at the herd or population level.

The value of the Texas A&M VET approach is recognized at a national level as evidenced by the team's deployment to Butte County, California in response to the 2018 Camp Wildfire. The assigned mission was to provide an Incident Management Team for emergency animal sheltering operations. The Texas A&M VET joined forces with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Animal Strike Team for the requested 60 day deployment. The team empowered local resources and provided consistency in management, allowing the mission to successfully conclude after a 30 day period.

The Texas A&M VET also fields a high consequence infectious disease (HCID) MRP. The VET trains for and is equipped to provide veterinary medical assistance when animals are involved in high consequence infectious disease events. Our first HCID deployment was during the 2014 Dallas, Texas *Ebola virus* incident. The VET provided quarantine and monitoring of a household pet belonging to one of the U.S. victims of the disease. This is a particularly timely point of discussion given the concern of the novel *Coronavirus* circulating in China. Household pets belonging to U.S. citizens being evacuated from China are not being allowed to leave the country but the Texas A&M VET stands ready to provide quarantine if necessary. This is, given the potential for the introduction of HCIDs into the country, a critical resource that needs to be available at a federal level.

#### FEMA OPPORTUNITY

Section 1218 of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act (P.L. 115–254) authorizes the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to establish a national veterinary emergency teams at accredited colleges of veterinary medicine. This provides FEMA with an opportunity to address the issues discussed above. The capabilities of the Texas A&M VET described above has the potential to provide a significant advancement in federal veterinary medical emergency response capabilities and enhance Urban Search and Rescue capabilities through excellence in veterinary medical support for search and rescue canines. The programs I have described above, represents a significant advancement over veterinary medical disaster response assets currently in the federal inventory.

In closing, I would like to thank you again for inviting me to testify on animal issues in disasters. I appreciate the committee's commitment to ensuring that the highest priority, human health, well-being, and safety is fully addressed by also addressing animal issues.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Dr. Meckes?

Dr. MECKES. Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Member Meadows, greetings from downtown Raleigh. Members of the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, I am Dr. Doug Meckes, and I serve as a State veterinarian, and director of the Veterinary Division in the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

The division includes 150 employees that serve North Carolina's poultry and livestock industries, manage and operate the State's four veterinary diagnostic laboratories, and are charged with the implementation of our Animal Welfare Act in kennels, shelters, and other animal facilities throughout the State.

North Carolina's robust agriculture and agribusiness industry is the number one industry in the State, and generated \$91.8 billion in economic value to North Carolina's economy in 2018, more than 17 percent of the State's gross domestic product.

The sector also employs 17 percent of the State's workforce. Within agriculture and agribusiness in North Carolina, the animal agriculture industry, comprised of livestock, dairy, and poultry, accounted for 68.5 percent of \$11.13 billion in farm cash receipts in 2018.

North Carolina ranks second in hog production, second in turkey production, and is one of the most diverse poultry-producing States in the U.S.

At these levels of production, there are significant numbers of animals and poultry on the ground on any given day in North Carolina, as many as 9 million pigs and 190 million poultry. That said, natural disasters or animal diseases have the potential to impact large numbers of any of these species.

The single most significant disaster in North Carolina history, the event that is now the frame of reference for all natural disasters, is Hurricane Floyd, September 11th, 1999. It resulted in the most severe flooding and devastation of North Carolina's history at that point in time. The flooding resulted in \$813 million in agriculture losses, the demise of 2.9 million birds, 28,000 pigs, and 619 cattle.

Disposal of mortality was managed in whatever fashion was most convenient. And sadly, to the detriment of the environment in some circumstances. Given North Carolina's commitment to properly managing mortality today, such an approach is unacceptable. In fact, Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler's marching orders with regards to storms and animal disease are, "We will not create an environmental disaster associated with an incident of mass mortality in our animal or poultry production." That guidance has served us well in North Carolina of late, for we have experienced three major hurricanes since 2016, two of which required significant mortality management efforts on our part.

North Carolina also has engaged in planning efforts since 2015 and 2016 for management of an outbreak of high-path avian influenza in our State. Fortunately, that has not come to pass. And since 2018 we have engaged in planning efforts for management of swine mortality in the event of an outbreak of African swine fever.

The efforts of North Carolina's agricultural response teams have undertaken in collaboration with our State colleagues, our subject matter experts from around the country, have contributed mightily to the current state of the art of composting in animal and poultry mortality.

I must also note that, during Hurricanes Matthew and Florence, FEMA engaged with our agriculture community in a most meaningful way, providing support for our various activities in managing poultry mortality. FEMA's support of North Carolina's efforts to protect public health and minimize environmental impact markedly decreased our response duration and provided for a more timely recovery of participating poultry farms. North Carolina looks forward to expanding our partnership with FEMA, and moving forward to a better understanding of FEMA's role in response to animal agriculture disasters.

With regard to the management of companion animals during disasters, I highlighted in my written testimony the activities of the Veterinary Division's Animal Welfare Section, Emergency Programs Division, and county animal control assets in response to such incidents.

Finally, I must say the Veterinary Division and the Emergency Programs Division in North Carolina believe there are currently gaps in existing capability at the State and Federal level to manage a catastrophic animal disease outbreak. Such an incident, usually considered the sole responsibility of USDA, could be of such consequence that all responses available would need to be brought to bear. Given the global character of trade, of travel, of illegal movements of agricultural products, perhaps it is time to consider a fully integrated approach to such an event.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on North Carolina's management of animals in disaster, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

[Dr. Meckes' prepared statement follows:]

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**Prepared Statement of R. Douglas Meckes, D.V.M., State Veterinarian,  
North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and members of the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, I am Dr. Doug Meckes, and I serve as the State Veterinarian and the Director of the Veterinary Division at the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS). The division includes 150 employees that serve North Carolina's poultry and livestock industry, manage and operate the state's four veterinary diagnostic laboratories, and are charged with implementation of the Animal Welfare Act in kennels, shelters, and other animal facilities caring for and housing companion animals in North Carolina.

North Carolina's robust agriculture and agribusiness industry is the number 1 industry in the state, contributes nearly \$91.8 billion on an annual basis to North Carolina's economy, more than 17% of the state's gross domestic product, and employs 17% of the state's employees.

Within agriculture and agribusiness in North Carolina, the animal agriculture industry—comprised of livestock, dairy, and poultry—accounted for 68.5% of \$11.13 billion of farm cash receipts in the state in 2018. Additionally, North Carolina ranks second in hog production, second in turkey production and, as one of the most diverse poultry producing states in the U.S., second or third annually in overall poultry cash receipts.

The Veterinary Division and the NCDA&CS's Emergency Programs Division (EP Division), established in the early 2000's, lead the Department's agricultural preparedness, response, and recovery activities. The EP Division partners with the Veterinary Division to protect North Carolina's animal agriculture industry and to formulate plans to meet the challenges facing agriculture and food in the 21st century. The mission of the EP Division is to "support the agriculture community and protect consumers by coordinating the Department's efforts to plan for, respond to and recover from emergency events and public health concerns that may impact agriculture in North Carolina." The EP Division is a unique operating entity as few other states in the nation have used this model. It is fully integrated into the State Emergency Management Division's operational structure as the lead agency for Emergency Support Function #11 (ESF#11) and engages on a day-to-day basis with internal and external stakeholders from the local, regional, state, and national level. Since its inception, the EP Division has had an all hazards approach and participated in response to animal disease, food illness outbreaks, wildfires, and, of course, hurricanes. Additionally, members of the EP and Veterinary Divisions have deployed in a variety of other incidents around the country to assist our counterparts in other states. Particularly impactful has been the Veterinary and EP Divisions' engagement with the animal agriculture industry at all levels regarding potential threats from catastrophic disease outbreaks to natural disasters.

In the past 3 years, North Carolina has been significantly impacted by, and stood up a robust response to, 3 major hurricanes—Hurricane Matthew (2016), Hurricane Florence (2018), and Hurricane Dorian (2019).

Hurricane Matthew made landfall on the coast of South Carolina on October 8, 2016 but caused historic flooding across central and eastern North Carolina—greater than that of Hurricane Floyd in 1999. Almost half of the state received a major disaster declaration. Though there were far greater numbers of poultry and livestock on the ground in 2016, there was less mortality: 2,800 swine (of 9 million on the ground in North Carolina every day), 1.9 million poultry (of the 190 million birds on the ground in North Carolina every day), and only a few cattle. All carcasses were properly managed, the swine predominately by their respective integrators and growers, and the poultry by integrators, growers and the significant efforts of state response teams which composted the birds. As a result, environmental consequences and public health concerns associated with mortality management were minimal. \$1.5 million from a FEMA Public Assistance Grant was used for the purchase of carbon source to facilitate the composting of poultry mortality. This was the first time that FEMA supported such an effort in a mass animal mortality incident.

Hurricane Florence made landfall near Wrightsville Beach in North Carolina as a Category 1 hurricane on September 14, 2018, again causing historic flooding across Eastern North Carolina and resulting in a major disaster declaration for more than half the state. The storm dropped as much as 35 inches of rain in the densest animal agriculture production areas of Eastern North Carolina. Approximately 4.2 million poultry and 5,500 swine were lost in 14 counties due to the storm.

Well ahead of landfall, on September 7, 2018, NC Governor Roy Cooper issued two storm-related Executive Orders. Executive Order 51 was the Declaration of a State of Emergency. Executive Order 52 was a Temporary Suspension of Motor Vehicle Regulations to ensure restoration of utility services and transporting essentials. It suspended, temporarily, weighing vehicles, including those used to transport animal feed, livestock, poultry, and crops, and waived the maximum number of hours of service for drivers of these vehicles. The agriculture industry of North Carolina relies on this waiver to move animals and harvested crops out of harm's way to reduce the impact to the agricultural industry as well as pre-position feed, fuel, and other supplies to ride out the storm. It is estimated that this waiver allowed the industry to move approximately 1.5 million poultry and thousands of swine prior to the storm, preventing further catastrophic losses.

NCDA&CS organized conference calls and meetings with industry partners (poultry, livestock, dairies, food firms) many days prior to the storm and continued those calls on a regular basis through landfall and response. The Veterinary Division also sent out maps created by Emergency Programs staff to industry partners that overlay National Weather Service data, including wind and rain forecasts, with farm location data (which the industry provides voluntarily to NCDA&CS) so the industry knows which farms may be impacted.

NCDA&CS fully activated its Agriculture Incident Management Team for coordination of all response and recovery operations for the Department on September 16, 2018. NCDA&CS also provided an ESF#11 Liaison to the State Emergency Operations Center. A typical Incident Command System (ICS) structure was used for response activities and included the following Operations Groups—Poultry, Livestock, Mortality Management, Companion Animal, Food and Drug, and Agronomic Services. A 24-hour public hotline was opened and staffed for the duration of the response.

The Poultry Group received reports from poultry companies and producers of damage and mortality and requests for assistance with depopulation and disposal. They deployed teams and equipment to assess and depopulate poultry due to animal welfare concerns in houses impacted by power loss, partial flooding, or building collapse.

The Livestock Group received reports of impacts to both commercial livestock facilities and small farms which included livestock running at large or stranded with farmers unable to deliver feed and fresh water or operate and refuel generators to run critical electrical functions of the animal housing. NCDA&CS response included the use of boats, high-clearance vehicles, and helicopters to address impacts to livestock.

The Mortality Management Group provided technical expertise specific to mortality issues on each impacted farm. The group also prioritized, planned, and monitored response operations on farms, verifying that prescribed activities were conducted and completed properly. Of 75 total poultry farms impacted, 58 farms entered the state's Mortality Management Program.

Based upon lessons learned from Hurricane Matthew in 2016, NCDA&CS and FEMA worked together to develop a \$12.6 million grant through FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) Program to support the Department's Mortality Management Program. The grant outlined three contracted service components for management of animal mortality by composting: Composting Subject Matter Experts, Carbon Acquisition and Delivery, and Removal and Hauling. Using this approach, which will become the model for all such future responses, the entire project was completed in only 35 days. The efficiency of this process protected the environment and public health and allowed for a timely return to production for affected integrators and growers.

NCDA&CS Veterinary and EP Divisions' experiences with animal mortality composting began in a meaningful way during the 2015 HPAI outbreaks in the Midwest. During the disease outbreak, composting as a means of mortality management became the method of choice. NCDA&CS staff adapted lessons learned about composting from that response to managing mortality due to flooding. Burial of animal carcasses in Eastern North Carolina, especially after a flood event such as Hurricanes Matthew and Florence, is not a solution to mass animal mortality due to the high seasonal water table.

NCDA&CS staff have continued to expand and perfect capability. In collaboration with Maine Cooperative Extension and USDA, NCDA&CS obtained grant funding to research effective techniques to improve animal mortality composting. In 2019, two demonstration projects and a composting school were conducted in North Carolina. Today, in the face of the threat of African Swine Fever to our swine industry, and with the knowledge of the catastrophic losses of swine in China and the far East with perhaps as many as 350 million swine dead, the necessity for a solution to mass animal mortality takes on even greater urgency.

Going forward, State agriculture agencies need more financial support to prepare and develop robust response programs. In addition, livestock response activities should be eligible for FEMA PA funding. Although response activities related to keeping livestock animals alive align with the FEMA Public Assistance eligibility requirements, such activities are often deemed ineligible for this funding. Providing relatively simple emergency response actions to save livestock animals potentially reduces mass mortality—a cascading event. Moving livestock to safer locations, feeding them, repairing fences and other containment structures, and other means of securing livestock are critical from a public health and safety standpoint. If livestock are outside of their containment areas (fenced pastures, barns, etc.), injury or death of nearby citizens, including responders, is an immediate concern, especially if the animals are in roadways.

We know that owners of companion animals are less likely to evacuate during a disaster unless they can bring their animals with them—this is, of course, the basis for the PETS Act. Livestock owners and their employees may likewise risk their lives to take care of these animals without proper equipment or supplies. Human lives can be saved by providing PA funding to those agencies or groups that have the authority to assist these owners in saving their animals. FEMA has previously determined that the expenses for providing shelter, bedding, feed, and supplies to horses and livestock incurred during wildfires in California in October 2007 were eligible for reimbursement as emergency protective measures (<https://www.fema.gov/appeal/219472>).

Uniquely associated with the management of animals in disasters in North Carolina is waste management. Within the state there are approximately 3,300 waste treatment lagoons associated with swine production operations. Proper management of these lagoons is recognized as essential to protection of the environment in anticipation of significant storm and rainfall events. The Veterinary, EP and Soil and Water Conservation Divisions cooperate with the Department of Environmental Quality of North Carolina which is charged with oversight of animal feeding operations and their waste management plans, in their efforts in anticipation of such storms to properly manage these lagoons.

Those pro-active efforts were successful during Hurricane Florence. Lagoons on just 6 farms suffered structural damage, 8 farms experienced inundation of lagoons with flood waters, and 28 farms experienced overflows of rainwater during the storm—98% of North Carolina’s active swine lagoons did not experience any of these issues. An inconvenient truth that received scant mention in media coverage is more than 121 million gallons of untreated and partially treated human sewage that discharged directly to surface waters at more than 200 municipal wastewater treatment systems across the state.

Finally, the rescue, care, and housing of companion animals must also be addressed during disaster. The Veterinary Division’s Animal Welfare Program, established by the North Carolina General Assembly to create a uniform system for the regulation of private and public animal shelters, oversees 930 such shelters and other companion animal facilities throughout the state. This Program is managed by the Animal Welfare Section (AWS) of the Veterinary Division. Many of these shelters and facilities stand in harm’s way of the hurricanes that frequently impact North Carolina. To appropriately prepare for these events, the AWS requests that every licensed/registered shelter or facility have a natural disaster response plan that has been approved by the local emergency management agency. The AWS and the EP Division work with local government, emergency management, and animal shelters/facilities to identify how these facilities will manage the animals long before a storm or disaster hits the community. The AWS also coordinates with these agencies and facilities ahead of time to develop protocols for set-up, registration, intake, animal care, sanitation, and demobilization of temporary animal sheltering areas co-located with human shelters. Temporary animal sheltering resources are prepositioned near the expected landfall area in the event of a forecasted disaster; these resources are then readily available, after the event, to care for displaced animals. Subsequent to the passing of the storm or when conditions permit access to shelters/facilities in the affected area, the AWS and the EP Division coordinate with national and local resources to support the hardest hit areas with personnel and re-

sources. In the immediate aftermath of the event, AWS and EP act as a clearing-house for donations of both monetary and material resources. Assistance is also provided to direct teams of volunteers to the shelters and counties that have the greatest needs.

During recovery from a disaster the AWS and EP Division continue to offer support and coordinate relief efforts for the animal shelters/facilities and affected communities. Inspections of temporary shelters continue until they have been demobilized and citizens are assisted with complaints concerning events that occurred during the disaster and its aftermath when under the jurisdiction of the AWS. The rescue, care, and sheltering of companion animals during disasters has been recognized as essential to a successful response. The Department's Animal Welfare Section leads the way in this important endeavor in North Carolina.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide insight into North Carolina's programs and efforts to address natural disasters and/or animal disease emergencies. Given the state's location on the eastern coastline of our Nation, there will, no doubt, be continuing needs to deploy our State's response teams. In such events, we look forward to expanding our partnership with FEMA, moving toward a better understanding of livestock response activities eligible for reimbursement, enabling our teams to readily manage storm impacts and, going forward, building upon current capabilities to improve outcomes. Additionally, our Veterinary and EP Divisions believe there currently exists a gap in capability at the state and Federal level for a catastrophic animal disease outbreak. Such an incident, usually considered the sole responsibility of USDA, could be of such consequence that all response resources available would need to be brought to bear. Given the global character of trade, travel, and illegal movement of agricultural products, perhaps it's time to consider a fully integrated approach to such an event.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Doctor.

Ms. MacPherson?

Ms. MACPHERSON. Good morning, Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Member Meadows, and members of the subcommittee, thank you very much for this opportunity to testify on the issue of animals in disaster—in my case, search and rescue dogs.

I am Teresa MacPherson. I am a member of Virginia Task Force 1, which is one of the 28 urban search-and-rescue teams in the country. And my position on the task force is canine search specialist. I am a dog handler. I have been a member of the Federal system since 1993, and have some extensive experience with flying dogs commercially in cabin.

I will be speaking for the Federal USAR dogs, but I understand that many, if not most, of the State teams also fall within the realm of what I will be talking about.

In the past, we dog handlers have had it pretty good with flying our dogs for training, testing, and deploying. We have been loosely lumped under service animals, and I would say our dogs are on a par with service animals, as far as health, temperament, and obedience training, which are the main things that the airlines are concerned with. After that, our paths diverge from service dog training, but the airlines don't really care that our dogs are trained to climb ladders, take a direction from 50 yards out, traverse rubble searching for victims in disaster situations like earthquakes, hurricanes, explosions, mudslides, tornadoes, pretty much whatever comes up. Our dogs are trained and tested to handle it.

In 2005, for Hurricane Katrina, all of the FEMA task forces responded on a rotational basis to Louisiana and Mississippi, some task forces responding twice. At one point I was asked by the FEMA USAR branch office for the FAA regulation that allows our dogs to fly in cabin commercially. They needed to get a lot of people to and from this place.



I responded that there is none. This was met with surprise, and there was discussion of addressing this issue in the future. But at this time we really weren't having any problems with flying our dogs commercially in cabin. They were being very accommodating, even welcoming. They treated our dogs like heroes.

But this has changed drastically in the past few years. The last time I was in the security line with my dog, I heard a passenger behind me say, "Wow, anyone can buy a working vest for a dog online." And sadly, it is true. And people do. Currently, the airlines have to deal with dogs with virtually no training, poor temperament, health issues, mainly because of fake working dogs and fake emotional support animals.

And I do not mean to disparage the legitimate service dogs or the legitimate ESAs. I am talking about the passenger who rings her call button and advises the flight attendant that her emotional support animal just pooped on the floor and needs cleaning up. True story.

Now the regulations are tightening up, and we are happy about that. But it is affecting our dogs in a negative way, because of the definition of a service animal, which is an animal that provides a specific function for a disabled person. That is not us.

So now we have no place, and the airlines don't know what to do with us. They make individual regulations that vary from airline to airline, change often, and result in general confusion on the part of the handler, as well as the airline personnel. Many times we have to wait while a supervisor is summoned, or get in a special line and wait until the dog guy comes in.

It is time to legitimize our dogs, and to be on a par with service animals for air transport. All of our dogs are screened, trained, tested, and certified. It is important to know that we can get to and from a disaster with our dogs, that we can respond as a specific canine resource. Most often we respond with our task force, which is 50 to 70-plus members, and comprised of heavy rescue, logistics, medical, hazmat, structural engineers, and more. And getting the dog component onboard can be problematic for the whole team.

We can provide the necessary paperwork to show our dogs are of sound temperament, healthy, and well-behaved. We would like to see this request to fly our dogs in cabin expanded to apply to training and testing, as well as deployment. It is important that the dogs are trained and tested in a variety of situations. They need to travel to different training sites. They need to experience different environments, because we need to train them to expect the unexpected.

The Haiti deployment really validated our dogs. There was no way to replicate in training a scene of such mass destruction, never-ending rubble, decomposing bodies everywhere, garbage, loose animals running around. Yet our dogs worked in this nightmare and they found people, including children and babies, saving their lives. So our training works.

But in order to teach our dogs to expect the unexpected, we need to continue to have the opportunities to train for it. And I thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to working with the subcommittee as it looks to address the challenges to ensure our search-and-rescue dogs are able to travel without restriction,

whether for disaster response, training, or evaluation in our effort to save lives.

[Ms. MacPherson did not submit a prepared statement.]

Ms. TITUS. Thank you so much.

Mr. Patch?

Mr. PATCH. Good morning, Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Member Meadows, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony on the importance of protecting animals during disasters.

My name is Richard Patch. I am the vice president for Federal affairs for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Founded in 1866, the ASPCA was the very first animal welfare organization established in North America. The ASPCA has a strong history of leadership in protecting animals in times of disaster.

We are pleased that local, State, and Federal agencies are increasingly prioritizing the care of animals during disasters. The ASPCA has witnessed firsthand how a lack of preparation can lead to dire consequences for animals left behind, and how the absence of appropriate planning can create burdens and risks for human victims, as well as responders.

It is important that we continue to elevate the need to include animals in disaster planning. Today I would like to discuss our organization's work in disasters, as well as some policy changes that will ensure our animals are better protected.

The ASPCA deploys nationwide at the invitation of State and local authorities to assist in relocation, search and rescue, sheltering, and placement of animals during disasters, including wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, and floods. Recent examples include responding with local authorities to the wildfires that devastated northern California last fall, assisting with search and rescue for animals affected by historic flooding in central Arkansas, and responding to multiple hurricanes, including Florence in North Carolina and Michael in Florida.

One of the key lessons learned during and since Hurricane Katrina, where an estimated 600,000 animals died or were left to suffer without rescuers or shelter, was that animals must always be a part of disaster planning. We cannot forget the images of dogs swimming to rescue boats or stranded on rooftops, nor can we forget the heartbreak of a 9-year-old boy separated by authorities from his dog, Snowball, while boarding a bus to evacuate. Many, faced with a difficult choice between evacuating to safety without their pets or staying behind, chose to stay with their pets. This is why modern, thoughtful disaster planning should always include animals.

We are thankful that Congress responded to the lessons from Katrina by passing the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act, the PETS Act, which requires that State and local entities include the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals into their disaster plans.

Additionally, Congress passed the Veterinary Medicine Mobility Act, which clarified that veterinarians could transport and dispense vital medicines while practicing in the field, including during disasters.

However, there are still gaps for animals in disaster planning that Congress can and should address.

First, the ASPCA urges Congress to pass H.R. 1042, the PREPARED Act. This bipartisan legislation, sponsored by Chairwoman Titus and Congressman Peter King, will ensure that animals in certain institutional settings like zoos, research facilities, and commercial breeding operations create commonsense plans to protect the animals in their care during disasters. Although these entities are regulated by USDA under the Animal Welfare Act, there are no Federal requirements that these facilities have emergency or disaster plans in place.

Second, we see a need for more resources to provide training and equipment for first responders to better handle and care for animals. An ASPCA survey revealed that more than 75 percent of responding States and counties reported additional needs for emergency training, expertise and equipment.

Third, veterinarians need more flexibility to deploy across State lines in response to disasters. We know hurricanes and other storms don't stop at State lines. Neither should our ability to provide emergency care to animals in disasters.

Lastly, there should be greater use of cohabitated and colocated shelters. Cohabitated shelters house people and pets together within a shelter, while colocated shelters have separate facilities for the humans and pets, but are typically in close proximity, enabling the families to regularly visit their pets, and even provide for their care.

We look forward to working with the subcommittee to find the best solutions to these challenges. With natural disasters occurring with increasing frequency and greater ferocity, preparedness is becoming ever more important.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to responding to your questions.

[Mr. Patch's prepared statement follows:]

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**Prepared Statement of Richard Patch, Vice President, Federal Affairs,  
American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Member Meadows, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on the importance of protecting animals during disasters.

My name is Richard Patch, and I am the Vice President of Federal Affairs for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The ASPCA was the very first animal welfare organization established in North America. Since our founding in 1866, we have worked constantly to alleviate animal suffering. In particular, the ASPCA has a strong history of leadership protecting animals in times of disaster.

We are pleased that local, state, and federal agencies, as well as communities around the country, are increasingly prioritizing the care of animals during disasters. The ASPCA knows firsthand that lack of preparation leads to dire consequences for animals left behind and that the absence of appropriate plans and operations creates burdens and risks for human victims and emergency responders. It is extremely important that we as a society continue to elevate the need to include animals in disaster planning.

THE ASPCA'S COMMITMENT TO DISASTER RESPONSE

The ASPCA regularly deploys nationwide at the invitation of state and local authorities to assist in pre- and post-storm relocation, search-and-rescue, sheltering,

and placement of animals during disasters such as wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, and floods. Since 2010, we have deployed for disasters across 24 states and territories. The ASPCA maintains memoranda of understanding with cities, counties, and states across the country that specifically define the roles our organization and emergency management authorities will play if we are asked to respond to a disaster. Even when we are not needed for deployment, we often provide remote expert consultation to help agencies prepare and carry out their operations.

In October 2019, the ASPCA, at the request of Sonoma County Animal Services, was on the ground helping animals impacted by the Kincadee wildfire that devastated Northern California. The ASPCA's team of disaster response professionals deployed with emergency response equipment and conducted animal search and rescue requests. We also performed welfare checks on non-evacuated pets and livestock. With support from the ASPCA and other groups, Sonoma County Animal Services was able to assist approximately 1,500 animals.

That response was in addition to our June 2019 deployment, at the request of the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, Livestock and Poultry Commission, to assist the Faulkner County Office of Emergency Management and the Faulkner County Animal Response Team with search and rescue and sheltering of over 70 animals affected by the historic flooding in central Arkansas.

In 2018, the ASPCA responded to a string of natural disasters, including deploying to North Carolina and South Carolina for Hurricane Florence, to Florida for Hurricane Michael, to Hawaii following a volcano eruption, and to California in the wake of both mudslides and wildfires. In that year alone, we assisted more than 9,000 animals through pre-evacuation, field rescue, and post-disaster relief efforts.

For a typical weather-related event such as a major storm or hurricane—which we can track before it makes landfall—the ASPCA's work begins by monitoring the storm and directing resources towards the likely affected areas. We maintain constant communication with emergency management agencies and local animal shelters to determine the best course of action to help animals in affected communities. Often, we deploy small teams of our responders, supplies, and other resources to staging areas located near locations expected to be heavily impacted. Once situated, those teams can monitor weather and transportation conditions as we await official requests for assistance.

We know that animal shelters are often inundated with displaced animals in the immediate aftermath of hurricanes and other major storms. To accommodate the increase in animals brought to shelters during these events and to ensure that displaced pets can be reunited with families, the ASPCA assists local shelters in advance work, including transporting their adoptable animals out of impacted areas to shelters in our relocation network or to other facilities. During the response to back-to-back Hurricanes Irma and Harvey in 2017, the ASPCA set up a temporary emergency shelter in South Carolina where adoptable animals from impacted areas were transported and cared for before being sent to shelters that could focus on their adoption. During those two storms, the ASPCA helped relocate more than 1,500 adoptable animals from impacted areas to shelters around the country to give them a second chance for a loving home. Working with Wings of Rescue in the response to Hurricane Dorian last year, the ASPCA transported nearly 200 adoptable animals from South Carolina's coast to animal shelters well outside of the storm's path.

In addition to our work on the ground during disasters, our organization provides grants and training opportunities to local agencies across the country to help enhance their animal response capabilities. In cases that do not require our direct deployment, we often consult to provide animal-specific expertise to FEMA and to state and local emergency management teams.

The ASPCA has been a member of the National Animal Rescue and Sheltering Coalition (NARSC) since its inception in 2006. This coalition of national organizations works with states to identify collaborative solutions to major human-animal emergency needs. Additionally, our organization has granted over \$2 million in the past decade to support animals affected by emergencies and disasters. Through our direct deployments, our subject matter expertise and consultation, and our grant awards, the ASPCA leads the nation in elevating the importance of including animals in disaster preparedness and response.

#### CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES FOR ANIMALS IN DISASTERS

One of the key lessons learned during and since Hurricane Katrina, where an estimated 600,000 animals died or were left to suffer without rescue or shelter, was that animals must always be a part of disaster planning. We cannot forget the images of dogs swimming to rescue boats or stranded on rooftops, nor can we forget

the heartbreak of the 9 year old boy separated by authorities from his dog Snowball while boarding a bus to evacuate. Many faced with the difficult choice between evacuating to safety without their pets or staying behind chose to stay with their pets. A Mississippi county emergency manager estimated that one quarter of the fatalities in their area were residents who chose to stay behind with a pet. This is why modern, thoughtful disaster planning should always include animals.

In response to these lessons from Katrina, Congress passed the Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act. Introduced by the late Representative Tom Lantos and Representative Christopher Shays, this law requires state and local entities to include in their disaster plans the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals. We have witnessed the benefits of the PETS Act in recent disasters. For example, more emergency shelters now allow families to bring their companion animals with them, and cities and municipalities routinely relax restrictions on animals on public transportation during disasters to aid evacuations. We have also seen increased inclusion of animals in planning and response by FEMA and other federal agencies engaged in disaster response, as well as more collaboration and communication between disaster response groups and local animal welfare organizations.

In 2014, Congress also acted to ensure that veterinarians can more effectively and easily respond to disasters by enacting the Veterinary Medicine Mobility Act. This law specifically clarifies veterinarians' ability to transport and dispense vital medicines while practicing in the field, including during disasters.

Congress can and should address the remaining gaps in the inclusion of animals in disaster planning. In particular, the ASPCA urges Congress to pass H.R. 1042, the "Providing Responsible Emergency Plans for Animals at Risk of Emerging Disasters Act" or "PREPARED Act." This bipartisan legislation, sponsored by Chairwoman Titus and Representative Peter King, will ensure that animals in certain institutional settings—such as zoos, research facilities, and commercial breeding operations—create detailed plans to protect the animals in their care during disasters and ensure that their employees know what steps to take when an emergency occurs. Although these entities are regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), there are no federal requirements that these facilities have emergency or disaster plans in place.

Animals in AWA licensed facilities are particularly vulnerable to disasters and pose a unique high risk to first responders. For example, Hurricane Katrina killed approximately 8,000 animals, including dogs and monkeys, at Louisiana State University's Health Sciences Center School of Medicine. The storm also cut off power to the New Orleans Aquarium of the Americas, resulting in the deaths of 10,000 fish. Many animals in these types of facilities may be dangerous or require highly specialized handling, further necessitating pre-planning that would help ensure they do not escape and put the public at risk. In 2015, big cats and other exotic animals escaped an AWA licensed zoological park in Oklahoma after a tornado struck. The risk to public safety forced the local sheriff to advise residents to stay indoors until the animals were accounted for.

The PREPARED Act is just one of many avenues for policy change to facilitate more effective disaster responses and to save more animals. For example, we see a need for more resources to provide training and equipment for first responders to better handle and care for animals. The ASPCA's National Capabilities for Animal Response in Emergencies (NCARE) survey findings, published in the *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* in 2017, revealed that more than 75% of responding states and counties reported needs for additional emergency training, expertise, and equipment.

Also, veterinarians need more flexibility to deploy across state lines in response to disasters. While the Department of Health and Human Services' National Veterinary Response Team (NVRT) has been helpful in major disasters, many veterinarians whose expertise is needed in disasters not large enough to meet the NVRT's activation threshold may have trouble attaining waivers to practice across state lines. Regulatory challenges relating to the transport of animals suggest a need for more flexibility during disasters. Hurricanes and other natural disasters don't stop at state lines—neither should the ability to provide emergency care to animals in disasters.

Another policy change that would positively impact companion animals during disasters is a greater use of cohabitated and co-located shelters. Cohabitated shelters house people and pets together in the same space. Co-located shelters house people and pets separately but are typically in close proximity, enabling families to easily and regularly visit and care for their pets (alleviating the burden on responding agencies). According to our NCARE survey, only 50% of counties with fewer than one million inhabitants reported having plans for cohabitational shelters, com-

pared to 80% of larger counties. With the proper planning and implementation, these shelters give pet owners the option of seeking shelter where both they and their pets will be safe. That peace of mind can be solace to a family that has lost everything in a disaster. We encourage FEMA to ensure that cohabitated shelters become the norm for housing animals in disasters. For millions of people, pets are part of the family. It is vital to implement disaster plans that consider the entire family.

We look forward to the opportunity to work with this Subcommittee to find the best solutions to these challenges.

#### KEEPING PETS SAFE DURING DISASTERS

The PREPARED Act would help protect animals housed in certain federally regulated businesses and institutional settings. However, individuals also have a responsibility to prepare for and take the necessary actions to protect their own animals when a disaster strikes. Though each type of disaster requires different measures to keep pets safe, the ASPCA urges families to take the following general steps to prepare their pets should they be impacted by a disaster:

- First, if you must evacuate, take your pets with you. If it's not safe for you—it's not safe for your pets. Pets should not be left behind or tethered to trees. This will prevent them from escaping emergency situations and getting to safe areas.
- Second, make sure all pets are wearing ID tags with up-to-date contact information. A pet's ID tag should contain his or her name, telephone number and any urgent medical needs. The ASPCA also recommends checking microchip registration information to ensure that contact information is up to date.
- Third, along with the emergency kit for human members of the family, we recommend creating a portable pet emergency kit with essential items including medical records, water, water bowls, pet food, leashes, and any required pet medications.
- Finally, it's important to choose a designated caregiver, such as a friend or relative outside the evacuation zone, who can take care of a pet in the event one is unable.

#### CONCLUSION

With natural disasters occurring more frequently, preparedness has never been more important. The ASPCA urges Congress to continue its work to protect animals in need by passing the PREPARED Act and to explore the other measures discussed here today. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on this very important topic. I look forward to answering any questions that the members of the Subcommittee may have.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Patch. Thank you all again for your testimony. You are the experts, and you have given us some things that we can work on.

We will now move on to Member questions. Each Member will be recognized for 5 minutes, and I will start by recognizing myself.

I would like to start with you, Ms. MacPherson. You were talking about the challenges for your dogs going for training, for deployment, and for evaluation, and the problem with being on—airline travel. You are an elite first responder. You need to get there. Your dog is your team. Are there other places where you have experienced some challenges being with your dog, besides on the airlines? And do you have any specific suggestions that we might do, working with the airlines to solve this problem?

Ms. MACPHERSON. Thank you—

Ms. TITUS. Because you are right, I have seen people carry a snake on a plane to say it is a support animal. It didn't give me much support, having that sitting near me, but, you know.

Ms. MACPHERSON. Thank you for that question. Really, our main concern right now is the in-cabin airline travel. As far as restaurants or public locations, we are not that concerned about, be-

cause we try to be respectful. If they don't need to be there, we don't try to put them there.

Hotels, though, hotels, that would be good to come under the service dog label, or—not their label, but our own label, but under that same category, so that we can—so we can lodge with our pets. Because sometimes, with our dogs, and on deployment, we are in hotels, and that can become problematic, just like the airline flying. It is, like, well, it is not really a service dog.

Ms. TITUS. That is what I was going to ask you. When you get to the scene of the disaster, where do you go with your dogs? I mean—

Ms. MACPHERSON. Oh, lots of times we are in tents. Sometimes we are in a sleeping bag on a parking lot until we can get the tents up.

But for many deployments, especially hurricanes, we are lodged in hotels, if it is possible.

Ms. TITUS. OK, thank you. Well, we will look at that definition, see if we can expand that.

Mr. Patch, you mentioned in your last recommendation—and the ones you gave were really good, and some things that we can actually get done. I don't want to wait until we get a massive bill. If there are little pieces that we can make improvements on, that is the intent of this committee. But the need for adequate resources, I would ask all of you—Mr. Patch says we need more resources.

Doctor, could you address that? What can FEMA be doing better, and what kind of resources do we need to enhance?

Dr. BISSETT. Well, I would start with the veterinary medical piece. And again, FEMA has this opportunity, and there are distinct differences between what teams like ours does and what the current inventory of response capabilities does from a veterinary medical perspective.

And so we really need to push that because, you know, a key part of what we do is working with communities on preparedness. We are planners, as well as responders. My own personal opinion, I think you need to be both. And we do that down at the local level. And the reality is they struggle to have the expertise, many local jurisdictions, to develop animal-focused plans. And so it just makes the situation worse when something does happen, because there is not a good plan there.

And so, having resources like ours that can play into that, I think, is critically important.

Ms. TITUS. Have you looked at the PREPARED Act that was mentioned that I have introduced to see if that kind of goes in the direction you are talking about?

Dr. BISSETT. It does. It does. And I think that—I know that there is a desire to have more accountability on information that is kept for animals by local jurisdictions. And that is so important, because the reality is we have—I think in many disasters we have animals wind up leaving the disaster area, and those victims don't have that opportunity to recover. It is typically household pets, but it could be livestock, as well.

And so any provisions like that to tighten things up and to drive us to a more prepared society, I think, is a really good thing. And a team like ours can help toward that end.

Ms. TITUS. Dr. Meckes, North Carolina has got a good reputation for leaning in on planning. We appreciate that. I know that FEMA has, like, a field hospital that it can take to a disaster site. Do we need something like a field hospital for veterinary services similar to that?

Dr. MECKES. During our most recent disasters, our Animal Welfare Section, our Emergency Programs Division, and our county animal control staff responded to all of the companion animal needs in a timely fashion, and we were able to move animals out of shelters that were in harm's way. We were able to bring resources to bear once the storm passed. And most of the animals ended up in shelters and with veterinary resources to care for them. So I am not certain that a hospital, as such, would be needed. If it were, it would be for a very short-term basis.

With regards to the livestock side, which is what we have been so engaged with, in Matthew we met with FEMA the day after landfall. We had a feel for the impact, especially to our poultry industry, given the knowledge we have of the location of the landfall, and the location of our poultry farms. And FEMA stepped up and provided us funding to buy carbon source material to begin to compost these birds in short order.

So—and in the subsequent Hurricane Florence, in which we had to respond, as well, we had really perfected some of our techniques, perfected our movement of product, movement of animals to make certain that we could do it in a timely fashion. So after Matthew it took almost 4 months for us to finish all the composting activities. After Florence it took us 35 days and we got folks back in business.

Ms. TITUS. I am glad to hear you had a good relationship with FEMA, because that is part of the challenge, is getting the FEMA reimbursements after some of these problems to deal with the animals.

Dr. MECKES. Yes.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Meadows?

Mr. MEADOWS. Dr. Meckes, I want to come back to the FEMA reimbursement side, because you mentioned that in your opening testimony. And obviously, sometimes the response, in terms of reimbursement, is either ambiguous or not at all.

What would be the two things that you would recommend that we could do, in terms of reimbursement for this component of either livestock reimbursement or animal shelters?

Obviously, if you have a number of household domestic pets that are being housed, there is an expense that goes along with that. Is that something that the counties just take on themselves? Does it get reimbursed? Or what could we do to improve that?

Dr. MECKES. Well, with regards to the companion animals, the counties have taken that on themselves. And again, as I mentioned, our Animal Welfare Section, volunteers from different counties will move to those counties most profoundly affected.

And we have not had to call upon FEMA for funds for managing of companion animals. We have gotten donations, we brought our colleagues from around the country to assist us. And any number of rescue groups are engaged, as well.



With regards to reimbursement for livestock and poultry issues, some of the pieces have been well accepted. Our proposals have been well accepted by FEMA. Others less so. Persistence has been the key for us in receiving reimbursements.

Mr. MEADOWS. All right. So how do we take the need for persistence right now, as you would delicately put it, and maybe change that into something that is a little bit better defined, that says, all right, if you hit this, then you qualify?

Here is my concern, is county by county you have different budgets.

Dr. MECKES. Right.

Mr. MEADOWS. And, as you know, in the eastern part of the State some of those counties are well-equipped and well-funded to be able to loan the money.

Dr. MECKES. Right.

Mr. MEADOWS. Other counties have an extremely difficult time, especially when you are taxing with other issues that are not livestock-related.

Dr. MECKES. Right.

Mr. MEADOWS. So it could be, you know, search and rescue, it can be a number of other taxing—so how do we take that part where—what I don't want you to have to do is call the chairwoman or me and say, "We are having a problem getting reimbursed from FEMA," if there is something that we can do, legislatively, to address that.

Is that something that you could come up with two or three recommendations and get back to the committee on?

Dr. MECKES. We can get back. I will say that it is all a matter of interpretation at the end of the day. We interpret some of the guidance from FEMA as meaning they will fully embrace our activities associated with response to livestock incidents. There is a gap there. USDA, obviously, has no piece of natural disasters, and responding to them.

But, from our point of view, it is much better to get feed to animals and diesel fuel to farms to keep the animals alive than it is to buy a carbon source material to compost them after they are dead. And so—

Mr. MEADOWS. Well, I would agree with that. And so I guess what I would say—

Dr. MECKES. Clarity that we—

Mr. MEADOWS. So on that clarity, if you could get with Commissioner Troxler and Mr. Sprayberry, and get a recommendation back to this committee, we would—I think there is a bipartisan support to do what is practical, and not make it ambiguous.

Mr. Patch, let me come to you. One of the difficulties any time that you have displaced people is that you have displaced animals, as well. And I can tell you that—what I would ask for you is maybe get to this committee your recommendations on how we can address the difficulty of cohabitating with animals that are perhaps displaced. Because when you put people in an emergency shelter, it becomes, you know—my pet may not be as welcomed as some other domestic pets. And it is kind of like with children, you know, some of them are great, and some of them are not as great.

[Laughter.]

Mr. MEADOWS. And I—these are great, back here.

So—and so my concern is what is acceptable for someone may not be acceptable for someone that—you are in a close confines with kids, and all kinds of other things.

And so, if you could help us with some recommendations on what you think is ideal, and then maybe what is practical, if you could get the committee some recommendations there, knowing that what is maybe ideal is not achievable, but the next best thing, if you could do that for us, Mr. Patch.

Mr. PATCH. Sure, Congressman. We will get you those recommendations. I will say—I wanted to tell you I am from Greenville, North Carolina.

Mr. MEADOWS. No, I know, and I tell you—I was going to—I was—I knew, when I introduced him, I actually—my staff had told me that, and I could say, “Go Pirates,” or go something, you know, that is there. So I am not sure if you are in G.K. Butterfield’s district, or in Dr. Murphy’s district. But regardless, on their behalf, welcome, as well.

Mr. PATCH. Thank you. Well, let me say, my mother lives in Morehead City, North Carolina, and I live here in DC, so I worry about her a lot. These storms that are affecting the coast of North Carolina have been tremendous, particularly in recent years.

Some of the work that the ASPCA does is to move animals out of those shelters in those affected areas before the storms come, and free up the resources of the hard-working people that operate those shelters while the storms are happening, so that there is someplace for those animals to go.

And as I mentioned in the testimony, I think greater flexibility is what you have heard from all of these witnesses today in times of disaster. And that is true for the cohabitated and colocated shelters.

Mr. MEADOWS. I thank you.

Mr. PATCH. Thank you.

Ms. TITUS. Ms. Mucarsel-Powell.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a special guest here with me today, Remy, because he is very interested in hearing from all of you this morning.

This issue hits very close to me. I represent an area in south Florida where we are heavily impacted by storms. It seems like every summer, every year, we have to prepare for a hurricane. And I have two dogs at home, Kali and Spike, and they are part of our family. I have kids, also. And my kids and my dogs actually behave very well, Mr. Meadows. I don’t know what you are—

[Laughter.]

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. But—

Mr. MEADOWS. I would expect nothing less.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. So I just can’t imagine leaving them behind.

And it was so interesting to me to see that 44 percent of the people who didn’t evacuate during Hurricane Katrina did so because they didn’t want to leave their pets. And I know that this is even more of a reality for our seniors. So I don’t want anyone in my district to have to make the decision of whether they leave, and leave their pet behind or not.

So Mr. Patch, in your written testimony—I just wanted to start by asking—you outlined some ways that people can prepare to care for their pets. And I just want to—if you could briefly describe that for everyone that is listening right now at home, what people can do. And if you can, highlight those steps that people need—

Mr. PATCH. Sure.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL [continuing]. To take to prepare for a hurricane.

Mr. PATCH. Yes, ma'am. And in response to your observation about people staying behind with their pets, it is heroic that they stay behind to care for their pets, but it is a failure of proper planning. And part of that planning is ensuring that you are prepared to leave when it is necessary. And in a district like yours, where these storms seem to hit with tremendous force, it is important that anyone that lives in an area like that have their—have ID tags for their animals, and have their microchips updated, and that they have supplies for the animals, and that they have a plan. Where are they going to go? Who is going to take care of the animals? Who—can they keep the animals with them? Can they get on a bus, or a train, or a plane? Being prepared and knowing those things in advance is important.

And back to the chairwoman's legislation, ensuring that commercial enterprises—zoos and research facilities and breeding operations—they know that these things could happen, and they should be prepared. And the title of your bill, they need to be prepared in advance.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. We have one of the most beautiful zoos in the country in my district also, Zoo Miami. And I know that they do a really great job of preparing for hurricanes. Is it possible, since you are mentioning this again, that they can actually coordinate with vets in the area to actually also take in some of these pets?

I just—I don't see that working as well. But if you can, provide some examples or ideas on that.

Mr. PATCH. I can't speak to that exact idea. I think—in response to your question, I think good zoos, good, accredited zoos are prepared. They have a disaster plan, and they are already—they are more prepared than many others. Whether or not they could help it, I think it depends on the events of that particular moment. But they should be prepared to provide that service, if it is possible, sure.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Thank you. And Dr. Bissett, like your emergency team at Texas A&M, the important work that they do to keep both animals and their owners safe—I am very proud of the similar work that we have in Florida by the University of Florida VETS Disaster Response Team. But unfortunately, there aren't enough people who are trained to take care of animals during disasters.

In your testimony you demonstrate how emergency teams from colleges of veterinary medicine are so crucial to disaster responses. And I can't imagine trying to coordinate disaster response for people without public health professionals or hospital systems involved. So it seems like there should be veterinary professionals involved in animal disaster planning and response.

Do you know of any available funding streams to strengthen training programs for veterinarians to be on the ground during disasters?

Dr. BISSETT. So I can tell you that has been a significant problem. Even with our team, we are the State's deployable veterinary medical resource, and yet we have had to survive and prepare primarily on donations. And donations wax and wane. And the challenges of maintaining a deployable unit with a constant level of readiness and a wildly fluctuating budget is a challenge.

And you do have to be trained to go into these situations. Our team, which is made up of faculty, staff, and students from the college, as well as private practitioners, private veterinary medical professionals from around the State, we have aggressive training. We have monthly trainings. We have multiple exercises a year. And it is all geared toward making sure that we can go into a community, work with that community to perform a safe and effective response.

Another thing that we do is very much work to enable that community. What we don't want to do is to go in, and then we are demobilized, and they have got issues. And so we try and leave a structure for that response to carry on as it winds down. And our history has been that most of those communities that we deployed to, we wind up going back to and helping them plan. And we become, you know, basically lifelong partners. All that takes a budget. That is a challenge.

And I would just comment veterinarians are willing to volunteer. One of the things that we have seen, though, in Texas, where we have had so many things happen, is they will volunteer once. And then, the next time you have a conversation, it is, "I can't afford that. I wasn't trained to be there. I am not going to do it again." And so having these structured teams, I think, are critically, critically important.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Thank you so much. I am out of time.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. Just to follow up on that, do you ever get reimbursed by the communities you serve? And does that come through FEMA? Or maybe it should.

Dr. BISSETT. So we are—the way our State has us set up, we are an eligible applicant. And so we submit our reimbursement packages through the State to FEMA, just like the other State response assets. That is in the declared events. And so we do get reimbursed. On the smaller events, we typically don't. That comes from our donor base.

Ms. TITUS. Do you have any recommendations to make that reimbursement work better, just as we were asking?

Dr. BISSETT. So, in all honesty, I have had really positive experiences, but we also have a very aggressive accountability program.

And I am just going to—in answering that question, and actually going back to something that Ranking Member Meadows asked about, was how do we make that reimbursement process better. Chief Kidd, our chief of the Texas Division of Emergency Management, one of the things that he has challenged our team with is making sure that we help local communities get to the point where they can—they have good accountability, good recordkeeping, so that those animal-based responses are indeed reimbursed. Because

I can tell you in Texas, the opinion is that a lot of those expenses go uncaptured. And for a community that is reeling from the economic outflow that a disaster costs, that is all important.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Doctor.

Ms. Norton.

Ms. NORTON. I have looked at your testimonies, Dr. Meckes and Dr. Bissett, where you discuss the integration of your organizations into emergency management disaster efforts, and that is very important to note that. But I am interested in the planning and preparation before the disaster occurs.

So let me ask you what role, if any, does climate change play in your preparations? We are already seeing indications of that across the country.

Dr. BISSETT. Well, I can speak to Texas, and I know that—I mean, there is no denying that our weather cycles have become more severe. We are seeing flooding in places that we have never seen it before because of the weather patterns, because of land use. There are a number of issues coming together.

And so it does take a more aggressive planning approach, as our climate does change, and our land use changes. You are going to have areas that now flood that used to not flood, either because of the rainfall or changes in drainage. In our 2016 Brazos River flooding I talked with a rancher that was distraught. He had moved his cattle from the Brazos River bottom to the hurricane pasture. It was the one that had never flooded before, historically. He lost 200 head. They floated down the river.

And so, as weather conditions get more severe, planning gets to be more aggressive. But whenever it comes to animals, most local governments don't think about the animal professionals that most local jurisdictions have: animal control officers, livestock officers. Many don't even have a veterinarian on staff. They have extension agents, which are amazing in our State, but it takes planning assistance. We have to have better plans as the problems become more severe. So it plays a huge role.

Ms. NORTON. I was surprised, Dr. Bissett, that your model is the only program of its type in the country. Are you working with other universities or other States in any way to replicate that model?

Dr. BISSETT. Yes. So we have. And I want to acknowledge some other programs that are very strong, as well. I know North Carolina State has a different model, where they teach emergency management that is successful. Florida, and their program, is successful, much smaller scale.

But rotations like ours, where all of our students go through a program, we are the only type in the country. And I am proud that our university will have educated between 1,400 and 1,500 senior vet students in this discipline by the end of this academic year.

That is the answer, is getting more people prepared to go out around the State, around the country, and to help communities get where they need to get.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Patch, do you think there need to be Federal requirements to track reunification of families and pets, that that would be helpful to the ASPCA's disaster relief efforts?

If not, what would help in your efforts to reunite families with pets that get separated during a disaster?

Mr. PATCH. Sure. Thank you, Congresswoman. Much of the work of the ASPCA is done in advance of these storms. We take the animals out of the shelters that are in disaster areas so that those services are available for disaster victims, lost pets, pets that have become—that are not with their owners any longer have a place to go and to be safe.

We are, obviously, for documentation. Animals that come into shelters should be properly documented, those that leave. And the better organized any shelter is, the more prepared they will be to be helpful in a time of crisis.

Ms. NORTON. So are there any systems to track where—so that a family would know where their pet was?

Mr. PATCH. It depends—

Ms. NORTON. By going online or by coming to some central location?

Mr. PATCH. No. I mean, disaster planning is at the very local level. And shelters operate in communities. And every community, every county, every State has different laws and regulations. Bigger counties have better—not always, but often have better organized systems and can address the needs that you have outlined.

Ms. NORTON. Madam Chair, I do think that there needs to be some kind of model for the States to know how to proceed with respect to pets that then could be disseminated, so you see how somebody did it, how Texas did it, or somebody did it, and you would know how to proceed. Because I am not sure this is on the minds of the average family, or a public official when they think about disasters.

So this is an important—it is an important hearing, Madam Chair.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much. And we want to look at that. I think Virginia is—supposedly has a gold standard for an online reporting at the animal custody record online reporting system. I don't know if any other States have established that, or if we need to look at that program.

Yes, Doctor?

Dr. BISSETT. So I know in Texas—and just to kind of give an example of how challenging the problem is, in many of the communities that we worked with in Hurricane Harvey, reunion rates were 75, 80 percent. One of the counties we worked with, their plan was actually to move their animals 90 miles away to a major city. That 90 miles was unbearable, and reunion rates were about 30 to 35 percent. So it is significant.

So it starts at the local level. Good planning, good documentation. Fostering the ability to develop good plans at the local level is key.

We have also—actually, I was in meetings right before I flew here. We have a similar program written into our plan, where counties that are impacted can provide information on the animals that were found. It goes into a database, up into a website, and it is going to become that centralized place for people that are missing animals to look.

Now it is challenging. And I know, from the Camp wildfire—and I am sure ASPCA has had the same experiences—you wind up having a lot of visits and it wasn't their animal, which is heart-

breaking. But it is such a worthwhile task, because when you see that person and that animal reunited, it is such a remarkable thing.

Ms. TITUS. I can only imagine. Well, as we look at the PREPARED Act, and requiring local and State governments to be prepared, maybe part of that preparation is establishing a record where you can check—an online reporting system should be part of that plan.

I wanted to ask you, Mr. Patch. You said your organization has a memorandum of understanding with various governments around the country. Is there anything that prohibits you from entering into those, or are there any problems, anything we can help to alleviate to make it simpler so that more communities or all communities have that kind of agreement with you?

Mr. PATCH. I don't know that we can handle all the communities. [Laughter.]

Mr. PATCH. I will check, Congresswoman. I know we have dozens, hundreds, perhaps, MOUs with cities, counties, States around the country.

And in addition to—one of the questions you asked earlier, the ASPCA is one of the—is the number two grantmaking body in the United States. We have provided tens of millions, \$150 million or more in the last 10 years, not all for disasters, but at least in part, and spent a lot of money in helping to prepare in disasters.

And that work is so important, and the work that all the people on the panel in preparing for disasters is so important. And this hearing, and putting the word out about your bill, which would do as much for animals as anything the Congress can do right now is so important. So thank you.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. Well, thank all of you very much. I feel strongly about this, and I think we need to do something. But hearing what you all are doing is reassuring that there are things happening, we just don't know about it, and we need to coordinate it better, and use your example in other places.

So I can assure you we are going to continue to push these issues. And any recommendations that you have for us, in terms of planning, or putting together a reporting system, or dealing with FEMA, we hope you will get them to the committee so we can move some kind of legislation.

You know, it is not a disaster, but something that also speaks to the value of pets to families is we also have statistics that show that a person will not leave a domestic violence situation or a home where there is abuse if they can't take their pet with them. So it is not just in an emergency. That pet is a critical part of a family's life.

So we very much appreciate what you are doing, and we will certainly stay in touch as we move this forward. Thank you.

Any further questions?

I guess we are it. So, seeing none, I would like to thank all of you again for your testimony. It has been very informative, very helpful.

And I ask unanimous consent that the record of today's hearing remain open until such time as our witnesses have provided any

answers or recommendations that may be submitted to us in writing.

I ask unanimous consent that the record remain open for 15 days for any additional comments and information submitted by the Members or witnesses to be included in the record if you have anything additionally you would like for us to include.

Without objection, so ordered.

If nobody else has anything to add, we will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:07 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]



## SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

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### **Prepared Statement of Hon. Peter A. DeFazio, a Representative in Congress from the State of Oregon, and Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

Thank you Chair Titus, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I'm very interested in this issue because animals are often overlooked when we think about emergency management and preparedness.

I have a dog, Mandy, at home in Oregon and anyone who visits my personal office or the Committee knows that we have pet-friendly offices.

Americans consider their pets to be part of their family. So, it's no wonder that such a large percentage of individuals who failed to evacuate during past disasters did so because they didn't want to leave their pets behind. During disasters, the well-being of Americans and their animals are inextricably linked.

However, this hearing is not just about pets. Service animals and livestock have entirely different evacuation, sheltering, and feeding needs when a disaster occurs.

Failure to properly account for farm animals during an emergency can have severe consequences, including economic losses and food insecurity for entire communities.

Service animals generally have broad protections for sheltering and transportation in emergency situations. However, search and rescue canines are not guaranteed the same protections under Federal law.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, this committee held several hearings to consider legislative proposals that would address the shortcomings in our national emergency preparedness framework. One of the pieces of legislation that came out of those hearings was the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act.

This bipartisan legislation was among the first to consider the well-being of animals during a disaster by requiring FEMA to ensure that State and local emergency preparedness plans address the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals following a major disaster or emergency.

It's time we take another look at the gaps in emergency preparedness with respect to animals. For example, there is currently no federal requirement that facilities regulated by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) have a plan to protect animals in their care during emergency situations.

The PREPARED Act, introduced by Chair Titus, would require that AWA licensed facilities create, implement, and file contingency plans with the Department of Agriculture. Although the bill was not referred to this Committee, it highlights issues that are squarely within our jurisdiction.

I support the Chair's legislation and hope we can use what we learn today as the basis for more protections for animals in the future.

Thank you. I look forward to hearing testimony from our witnesses. I yield back.

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### **Prepared Statement of Hon. Sam Graves, a Representative in Congress from the State of Missouri, and Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

Thank you, Chair Titus, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

As already noted, we're focusing today on challenges that communities face during disasters; in particular as it relates to animals.

Many of you know that my district experienced historic flooding last year.

This flooding impacted tens of thousands of acres of farmland and caused significant damage to homes, communities, and infrastructure.

With so many constituents in my district reliant on farming, and growing up on a farm myself where I continue to have family who raise cattle, it is important that the well-being of livestock be a serious part of disaster relief and mitigation efforts. I look forward to learning more about state and federal plans to protect this vital part of the rural economy.

Thank you, I yield back.

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**Statement of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Emergency Management Task Force, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Dina Titus**

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Emergency Management Task Force submits the following statement for the record for the February 12, 2020, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Preparedness hearing on the Welfare of Animals in Disasters. CCD is a coalition of more than 100 national disability rights, advocacy, consumer, provider and self-advocacy organizations representing this nation's 57 million people with disabilities. The Emergency Management Task Force concerns itself with disaster planning, preparedness, response and recovery issues affecting people with disabilities throughout the United States, its territories and Puerto Rico.

The subcommittee heard from a panel of witnesses focusing on adverse impacts on people and communities that derive from failure to plan for the welfare of animals as well as recommendations for improving the response of emergency management systems to the protection and survival of animals in disasters. Of particular concern to the members of this task force are the effects that poor planning and implementation of disaster response can have on people with disabilities who rely on service animals or who may be adversely affected by well-intentioned policies for sheltering companion animals.

Unfortunately, disaster response systems repeatedly fail to consider the needs of people with disabilities and their service animals in disasters despite laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act. Under the ADA, a service animal is defined as a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. The task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person's disability. As you know, that law requires all emergency shelters to accommodate people with disabilities in the most integrated setting, along with any service animal that accompanies them. Poorly trained emergency response personnel have refused to evacuate service animals, leading some people with disabilities to refuse to leave a dangerous living situation in the face of an oncoming storm. When they arrive at an emergency shelter, people with disabilities have been separated from the service animals that enable them to navigate independently. We trust that any legislative efforts to strengthen the training of emergency response personnel in managing animals in a disaster will include existing obligations to abide by the ADA.

To be sure, there have also been occasions where states have stepped up to ensure that people who depend on service animals are able to keep the animals with them in emergency sheltering. In its report on the 2017 hurricanes aftermath in that state, *The Storm After the Storm*, Disability Rights of North Carolina described the value of shelters that accommodated survivors' service animals.

One of the survivors there reported that having his dog with him and knowing he was well-cared for 'meant the world' to him. In another shelter, a veteran with chronic PTSD said having his dog nearby (in a trailer behind his shelter) where he could visit with him daily helped him to manage his symptoms. In yet another shelter, a survivor was provided a separate room so they could be with and care for their dying dog."<sup>1</sup>

Reference was made during the hearing to the PETS Act which requires that states and localities include in their disaster plans the needs of people with household pets and service animals. This law has obviously been of considerable comfort to many people faced with having to leave their homes in a natural disaster. However, unless managed properly, unintended consequences can result that violate the rights of people with disabilities in a disaster. That same report by Disability Rights of North Carolina highlighted the story of a mother of a 26-year-old non-verbal young man with severe autism who was deeply afraid of dogs. Her son became aggressive and agitated when shelter staff "would not allow him, his mother and 27-year-old sister to stay in an area of the shelter away from service animals." In a

<sup>1</sup> *Storm After the Storm*, Disability Rights of North Carolina, [https://disabilityrightsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/DRNC-Report\\_The-Storm-after-the-Storm-2.5.19.pdf](https://disabilityrightsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/DRNC-Report_The-Storm-after-the-Storm-2.5.19.pdf)

previous shelter, staff had permitted the family to stay in a room separate from other survivors because of the son's sensory concerns. "At the new shelter, the family was told they had to be grouped in a room with other people with disabilities, which she said was called 'the disability room'" that included two service animals.

We ask the committee to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities are not inadvertently discounted in any legislation seeking to accommodate people with service and/or companion animals.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the task force.

ERIN PRANGLEY, CO-CHAIR,  
Director, Policy,  
*National Association of Councils on  
Developmental Disabilities.*

SUSAN PROKOP, CO-CHAIR,  
National Advocacy Director,  
*Paralyzed Veterans of America.*

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