

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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**REPRESENTATIVE TED J. EISCHEID**

WHILE IN SESSION  
STATE CAPITOL  
120 4<sup>th</sup> St.  
JUNEAU, AK 99801  
(907) 465-2095

WHILE IN ANCHORAGE  
1500 W. Benson Blvd.  
ANCHORAGE, AK 99503  
(907) 269-0240

## **Sponsor Statement** **House Bill 335: Disaster Animal Rescue** **34-LS1531\A**

I am proud to sponsor HB 335 to strengthen Alaska's emergency preparedness by ensuring the safety, care, and reunification of pets and service animals during disasters. Pets and service animals are integral members of many Alaskan households; their welfare is a public-safety concern that affects evacuation success, sheltering logistics, and the mental and physical well-being of their owners. This bill advances practical, humane, and coordinated measures so communities and responders are better equipped to protect animals and people in times of crisis.

### Key provisions

1. Limited licensure exemption for out-of-state veterinarians and veterinary technicians. HB 335 extends a narrowly framed licensure exemption to veterinarians and veterinary technicians who are a) licensed and b) reside in another state when they assist under the pet and service animal disaster emergency plan. This allows qualified professionals to provide timely, supervised medical and triage support during declared emergencies without adversely impacting Alaska's licensing standards or public-safety protections.
2. Creation and maintenance of a statewide Pet and Service Animal disaster Emergency Plan. The Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management will prepare and maintain a comprehensive plan that: (a) sets an operation process for evacuation, transport, and temporary sheltering of pets and service animals; (b) identifies shelters able to temporarily house animals and establishes an identification system to facilitate reunification with owners; (c) authorizes properly contained animals on public transportation during evacuations; (d) establishes procedures to enable out-of-state veterinary professionals to assist; and (e) implements a public information program to guide owners in evacuation planning, provide an emergency checklist and identify local organizations for assistance.
3. Representation for animal-welfare professionals on the Alaska State Emergency Response Commission. HB 335 increases the Commission from seven to eight members to include an appointee from a statewide association of animal control officers, a shelter staff member, or another animal welfare professional operating in Alaska. This ensures the Commission benefits from direct expertise in animal handling, sheltering, and reunification logistics.

Recent emergencies in rural Alaska have demonstrated the need for more advance planning for animals and have illuminated confusion about the implementation of current plans, delaying evacuations, increasing danger to responders, and resulting in unnecessary suffering and long-term displacement for animals and their owners. HB 335 aligns Alaska with best practices in emergency management by integrating animal welfare considerations into overall response planning, improving sheltering and reunification outcomes, and enabling rapid, professional veterinary support when needed.

I urge my colleagues to support HB 335 to protect Alaskans and their animals, enhance operation readiness, and strengthen our state's compassionate, coordinated emergency response.