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April 9, 2026

House Labor & Commerce Committee

Capitol Building 120 4th St. Juneau, AK 99801

RE: HB335 Disaster Emergency Plan for Pets

Dear Co-Chairs Fields and Hall, and Committee Members,

Best Friends Animal Society is a national non-profit 501(3) whose mission is to provide free training, programming, and grants to animal shelters that will increase the live outcomes for dogs and cats that come into your local community animal shelters. We have been working in Alaska since last year while there experienced the typhoon that occurred last October.

Alaska does not currently have a basic and comprehensive plan to accommodate pets belonging to residents who need to evacuate due to a disaster. The federal government and the disaster response agencies realized after Hurricane Katrina that animals needed to be included in disaster planning and evacuation efforts. Thousands of residents in Louisiana that were evacuated were told they could not take their pets with them, but they would be able to return in a few days. Most of those made sure their pets were secured and left with food and water, intending to return and reclaim them. What happened was that the damage and devastation was so bad that most people could not return to their homes for a few months and their pets perished. Many people who were not willing to leave their pets and who chose to stay in their homes also did not make it out alive. Many lessons were learned from this event, and one of them was that people consider pets a part of the family and were devastated to have to leave them behind.

The states of Florida, Louisiana, Texas, and Washington have incorporated pets into their state disaster plans. Several of the impacted shelters in Alaska that responded and housed displaced animals met and identified key areas where they felt guidance was needed for pet owners and they identified gaps that needed to be filled to respond to disasters in a timely and organized way that would keep people with their pets.

HB335 outlines some commonsense suggestions to address the gaps. One of the key parts of this proposed legislation is to add an additional member to the current Office of Emergency Management who is a member of the animal sheltering community who can



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advise and function as a champion and liaison to the committee. This is essential to have a point of contact who knows how animal sheltering works and what the capacities are at the receiving facilities.

This bill will keep families together with their pets even after suffering the possible loss of their home or community. The bill has no fiscal impact, and we are requesting that the committee support HB335.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "Lisa Kauffman".

Lisa Kauffman
Campaign Senior Strategist, Electoral Initiatives
Best Friends Animal Society