

Clark, Fitzpatrick, Buchanan, and Porter Urge Funding to Aid Domestic Violence Survivors and Pets Amidst COVID-19

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, April 22, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Washington, D.C. — Nearly eighty Members of the U.S. House, led by Reps. Katherine Clark, D-Mass., Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., Katie Porter, D-Calif., and Vern Buchanan, R-Fla. [sent a letter to](#) House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. and Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy, D-Calif., urging leadership to include \$4 million funding in the next COVID-19 package to help domestic violence victims and their pets. In recent weeks, it has been reported that incidents of domestic violence are on the rise. For those with pets who need to flee, few options are available to reach safety because only a small percentage of shelters have the capacity to accommodate pets.



PAWS Act

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Holly Gann, director of federal affairs at the Animal Wellness Foundation

“A home should be a safe place, but sometimes it's not, and domestic violence has been an overlooked issue in the midst of the pandemic,” said Holly Gann, director of federal affairs for Animal Wellness Foundation. “As our nation deals with this crisis and stay-at-home orders, there are still very few domestic violence shelters able to accept pets, and victims are forced to make the terrible choice between their own safety and the safety of their cherished pets.”

“The prolonged period of isolation necessary to control the spread of coronavirus has led to dramatic increases in domestic violence, and those affected need our immediate

help,” said Rep. Katherine Clark. “Most transitional housing services and shelters are currently unable to accommodate survivors with their pets, and as a result, many stay in dangerous situations to protect their pet family members. We urgently need this targeted, emergency assistance to keep both survivors and their pets safe.”

“With people across our nation complying with stay-at-home orders, law enforcement has unfortunately seen an increase in the number of domestic violence calls they are receiving,” said Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick. “We must address this situation immediately and support funding for safe housing for domestic violence victims, their children, and their pets. Everyone deserves to feel safe, and to be safe, and this funding is an important step toward that goal.”

“The impact of the coronavirus has caused significant hardships for Americans across the country and has tragically led to a surge in domestic violence cases,” said Rep. Vern Buchanan.

“Additional funding for domestic violence shelters and housing assistance will help keep thousands of victims safe from being trapped with their abuser. We need to act swiftly and get this support to those who desperately need it.”

“The troubling increase in reports of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights how we need to do more to empower survivors,” said Rep. Katie Porter. “Forcing people to choose between staying with an abuser or caring for their family — pets included — is just plain wrong. I’m proud to help lead this strong bipartisan effort to that would better protect survivors.”

In December 2018, the Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act, led by U.S. Reps. Katherine Clark and Jeff Denham, R-Calif, and U.S. Sens. Gary Peters, D-Mich., and Dean Heller, R-Nev., was enacted to help address the issue of domestic violence against pets and the lack of ability to accommodate pets in domestic violence shelters. The PAWS Act authorized \$3 million yearly until Fiscal Year 2023 to establish a grant program to provide emergency and transitional housing assistance so that more victims can flee an abusive situation with their pet.

The PAWS Act amended federal domestic violence laws to prohibit an abuser from killing, injuring, harassing, stalking, or engaging in conduct that places a victim in reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury to their pet. This includes using the mail or other electronic communication to engage in conduct that would make a victim fear for their pet. Violating this law carries a penalty of up to five years. These protections are already available to the domestic violence victim and their family — and now the protections are extended to include their pets as well.

During the FY2020 Appropriations cycle, Congress included \$2 million to fund this grant program. Two million in funding was adopted in the House’s version of the Agriculture Appropriations bill, and the Senate adopted \$3 million due to the work of Sens. Martha McSally, R-Ariz., Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., and Gary Peters.

The additional \$4 million would fund the Department of Justice Emergency and Transitional Pet Shelter and Housing Assistance grant program authorized by Section 12502 PL 115-334 on the basis that domestic violence has risen during the pandemic as victims face prolonged periods of isolation with their abusers.

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Holly Gann, director of federal affairs at the Animal Wellness Foundation



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The Animal Wellness Foundation (Foundation) is a Los Angeles-based private charitable organization with a mission of helping animals by making veterinary care available to everyone with a pet, regardless of economic ability. We organize rescue efforts and medical services for dogs and cats in need and help homeless pets find a loving caregiver. We are advocates for getting veterinarians to the front lines of the animal welfare movement; promoting responsible pet ownership; and vaccinating animals against infectious diseases such as distemper. We also support policies that prevent animal cruelty and that alleviate suffering. We believe helping animals helps us all.

Animal Wellness Action (Action) is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. We champion causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife. We advocate for policies to stop dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty and to confront factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, we promote enacting good public policies and we work to enforce those policies. To enact good laws, we must elect good lawmakers, and that's why we remind voters which candidates care about our issues and which ones don't. We believe helping animals helps us all.

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