



California Animal Welfare Association

Promoting Excellence in Animal Care, Sheltering, and Law Enforcement since 1909

August 18, 2022

The Honorable Miguel Santiago
California State Assembly
1021 O St., Ste. 6150
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1881 (Santiago) Animal Welfare - OPPOSE

Dear Assemblymember Santiago,

We, the undersigned shelters, animal care agencies, and nonprofit rescue organizations regretfully submit this letter of opposition to AB 1881 (Santiago). We had hoped that the engagement of our statewide association, CalAnimals, to secure reasonable amendments to the bill to remove our opposition would have been successful, but it's become very clear that we must all engage to share our concerns.

As professionals committed to the sheltering, care, reunification, and adoption of dogs and cats, we wholeheartedly agree that shelters and pet owners have a duty to make certain their dogs and cats live lives free of cruelty, abuse, and neglect. California statute already sets these standards and empowers enforcement agencies to ensure these basic requirements are met. This bill appears to appeal to an educational approach to ensuring proper care. We also agree that education is key, which is why our sheltering operations across the state provide services to ensure adopters are prepared to take on the responsibility of a new companion.

AB 1881 is entirely misdirected. Where shelters and rescues work to create great adoptions, AB 1881 is intended to stop people from adopting. The suggestion that those coming to shelters to help homeless animals are uneducated and ill-intended is hurtful to the very people who are making lifesaving change in our state.

California's animal shelters have made significant lifesaving progress in the past decade without any financial support from the state.

And still, shelters and rescues are facing very real and significant challenges right now that this bill does nothing to help. In fact, as it's our understanding that the posting requirement is specifically intended to discourage adoptions, it's not only unhelpful, but the exact opposite of the outcome we are all seeking.

Throughout the state, incoming animals are greatly outpacing adoptions and animals are staying in shelters 2x longer than last year. To be clear, these are not adoption returns, these are animals acquired outside of the shelter and rescue environment that we are seeing come through our doors. Shelter returns are not the problem or even a major factor.

Animal shelters are seeing surrendering of pets, not because they aren't wanted anymore, but because life situations are leading them to this decision. Insecurities like housing, food, and financial are placing

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Californians in desperate situations. Inflated and limited access to vet care are also concerns. Working in a shelter and seeing people tearfully give up their pets because they feel incapable of providing care is our current situation.

Adoptions are a critical component of lifesaving and a bill intended to stifle that outcome is misguided and most certainly misaligned with our state's \$50 million California for All Animals program.

If the legislature's intent is to keep pets and their families together and provide the resources to do so, there are very real issues that should be addressed. California is home to many veterinary deserts where access to care is nearly non-existent. And statewide, we are experiencing a critical shortage of veterinarians that is impacting every community, whether resourced or not. There are local government animal care agencies whose only option for spay/neuter services or after-hours emergency care is to drive an hour or more out of their jurisdictions. AB 1881 does nothing to address these real animal welfare problems.

AB 1881's focus on shelters and rescue groups sends a deliberately judgmental and unsupportive message to, not only the folks working on the front-line, but to struggling families and to the good people of California who choose to provide homeless pets a place in their families.

Lastly, the mechanisms for enforcement are a terrible use of local law enforcement resources to even contemplate shelters and rescue organizations being *fined* for not having this posting up at all times. Animal protection organizations targeted by AB 1881 are doing the hard work for animal lifesaving in California and range from foster-based rescue groups to municipal and nonprofit shelters that cover small cities or have jurisdictions that span over 4,000 square miles with multiple campuses. Even better-resourced organizations are currently facing staffing shortages and the new duty of monitoring "conspicuous" signage postings when multiple factors are at play including human and animal elements does not advance our missions and won't improve animal welfare even a bit.

This is not a "feel good" bill, nor is it helpful to shelters, rescues, adopters and the cats and dogs it proposes to aid.

We respectfully ask that you please vote NO on AB 1881.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Jill Tucker, CAWA
CEO

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Madeline Bernstein, President
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Nancy McKenney, CEO
Marin Humane

Melanie Sadek, President
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