

The Honorable Representative _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Senators _____
The U.S. Senate, U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Representative _____ and

Senators _____ :

A disaster preparedness plan without provisions for animals is a *bad plan*. In America, companion animals live in over half of all households. In New Orleans alone, 50,000 to 70,000 dogs are pets. This American Veterinary Medical Association estimate doesn't account for cats who inhabit 3 of every 10 American homes, according to Humane Society of the U.S. figures.

Disaster victims should never have to choose between survival and their pets. Yet that is exactly what happened in Katrina's wake. The images are unforgivable: A white dog is ripped from a boy's arms as he boards a bus. A bewildered yellow Lab watches his family disappear in a helicopter. An elderly woman cannot receive medical care unless she deserts her cats.

This is an emergency preparedness plan so out of touch with constituents, it can neither protect nor save them. In fact, Katrina "stragglers" cited pets as the foremost reason for staying in flooded areas. Conversely, when Galveston, TX Mayor Lyda Thomas allowed pets to accompany evacuees on buses, nearly every resident departed before Hurricane Rita struck.

The human death toll might have been lower if an enforced plan to accommodate animals had been in place. I ask my Representative to support and cosponsor The Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act, H.R. 3858). I ask my Senators to sponsor comparable legislation in the Senate.

Initiated by Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA) and cosponsors Christopher Shays (R-CT), Don Young (R-AK), James Oberstar (D-MN), and Barney Frank (D-MA), the PETS Act requires state/municipal preparedness plans eligible for FEMA funding to contain provisions for companion and service animals.

To fully implement protocols on the rescue/shelter of animals during a disaster, the federal government must also be willing to consult with accredited animal welfare organizations.

Tens of thousands of pets are still emaciated, dehydrated, and poisoned in empty New Orleans parishes. While animal rescue groups have managed to save more than 6,000 animals in Mississippi and Louisiana, they should have received federal and state aid from the onset.

Please insist that the President, Governors Blanco and Barbour, Secretary Chertoff, and Secretary Rumsfeld authorize responders under their command to carry out animal rescue and relief missions now.

I trust you will sponsor/cosponsor The Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act—so a tragedy of this magnitude doesn't repeat itself.

Thank you,