



Testimony

Submitted on behalf of the

Pennsylvania Federation of Dog Clubs

Before the:

Pennsylvania Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee

Presented by:

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Chairman Barrar, Chairman Sainato, and members of the committee, my name is Darin Cox and I am President of the Pennsylvania Federation of Dog Clubs. The PA Federation of Dog Clubs represents dozens of canine related organizations across the Commonwealth, from the Kennel Club of Philadelphia to the Admiral Perry Obedience Training Club in Erie, and many varied groups inbetween.

Thank you for holding this hearing on the Emergency Preparedness efforts in Pennsylvania. We support the Pennsylvania State Animal Response Team and we have a seat on the Board of PASART. We aim to bring the views and needs of the citizens of Pennsylvania who own or interact daily with dogs to the table during disaster planning. I am the representative of the PFDC on the Board of PASART, and I volunteer with the Cumberland County Animal Response Team under PASART.

For decades since the founding of the PA Federation of Dog Clubs, one issue that has repeatedly been raised by dog owners is what can be done with or for their pets should a disaster cause them to abandon their homes. Make no mistake, this is not only an issue about domestic animals. When Hurricane Floyd struck North Carolina in 1999, there were few plans for production and pet animals. Since pet animals were not allowed in shelters, it was suggested that owners turn their animals out to fend for themselves as the odds of survival were better that way as compared to being confined in a home or other building. Production animals sheltered in-place as best they could. The results were packs of dogs formed and endangered children on their way to and from school in the weeks following the storm. The carcasses of many production animals killed in the storm were floating in flood waters immediately after the storm causing a profound public health concern.

Many other public health concerns revolve around a lack of plans including domestic animals. The number one reason given by people for not evacuating during Hurricane Katrina was they could not take their pets with them to shelters. Also, a top reason given by those returning to homes before the evacuation order was lifted was a concern for animals left behind. Clearly, these people not only put themselves in danger, but also first responders who were tasked with rescuing them.

Pennsylvania has seen outbreaks of avian influenza in the past, and could easily see similar outbreaks in the future. When a disaster like this occurs, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture has plans in place to respond, but manpower could become an issue, especially for site security. Having volunteer teams already in place who have trained on farms and are trained in Incident Command System (ICS) and National Incident Management System (NIMS) protocols would be invaluable.

During disaster debriefing meetings after North Carolina's 1999 Hurricane Floyd plans were formed to create volunteer teams from stake holders in domestic animals who would be trained to work with emergency management agencies and respond in times of disaster. In 2004, veterinarians with the PA Department of Agriculture and officials from the PA Emergency Management Agency began working with stake holders in Pennsylvania on creating a similar program here. Later that year the stake holders' summit was held in State College, PA and the Pennsylvania State Animal Response Team was born.

Since then significant investments have been made the US Department of Homeland Security, regional counter-terrorism task forces, county emergency management agencies, corporations, and private organizations such as the PA Federation of Dog Clubs in this effort. Today, there are teams in all 67 counties of the Commonwealth at varying levels of response capability. All have at least one trailer stocked with equipment to set up a temporary shelter on short notice. Some have two or more trailers if the demographics of their communities warrants equipment for both pet animals and production animals. The vast majority of this equipment has been purchased using grants from the US DHS.

Hundreds of volunteers across PA have invested thousands of man-hours in training in the handling of production animals and pet animals. They are organized into County Animal Response Teams (CARTs) and answer to that county's emergency management agency. All are required to complete online or in-person training in the Incident Command System (ICS) and National Incident Management System (NIMS) produced by the US DHS. All county animal response teams under PASART are dispatched by their county emergency management agencies only. Therefore, no one self deploys.

These CARTs are already making an impact in their communities. During flooding events like Hurricane Irene in August 2011, Tropical Storm Lee in September 2011, and Superstorm Sandy in October 2012 they opened dozens of shelters throughout eastern Pennsylvania. Their durations varied but some, like the Dauphin County Animal Response Team, went on for weeks after Tropical Storm Lee. Other smaller shelter deployments have occurred since as a result of ice storms taking out power. When human shelters are opened by the American Red Cross, CARTs can open a corresponding shelter for domestic animals nearby to help ease the minds of the displaced and prevent those pets from becoming a public safety issue.

County Animal Response Teams have aided law enforcement during seizures of animals for Humane Law violations. On numerous occasions CART teams have set up temporary emergency shelters when Dog Law Wardens and Humane Police Officers have served warrants on substandard commercial kennels and shut them down. One such seizure was so large, the effected animals were brought to the PA Farm Show Complex where numerous CARTs manned the emergency shelter for 2 days until all the animals could be distributed to humane societies and other shelters.

As recently as January 22, 2016, volunteers with the Lehigh, Carbon, and Schuylkill County Animal Response Teams aided State Police Officers in transporting and sheltering 16 horses, 10 dogs and numerous other animals seized from a property in Jim Thorpe, PA.

On February 16, 2016, Westmoreland CART volunteers responded to a horse down in a trailer during transport. They aided a veterinarian who determined the horse had suffered a dislocated hip, resulting in euthanasia of the animal. These deployments do not always have a happy ending. No citizens were injured because enough knowledgeable manpower was on-hand to deal with the situation.

On January 29, 2016, Lehigh CART volunteers responded with the East Salisbury Fire Department to a dwelling fire. They took custody of pets from the home and transported them for veterinary care, allowing fire fighters to concentrate on their jobs.

PASART now has 3 mobile pet sheltering trailers in the Commonwealth. One stationed in Greensburg serves the western region, one stationed in Carlisle serves the central region and one in Allentown serves the eastern region. Each of these has permanently mounted crates that can house between 17-24 animals with variable separators, an electric generator, heating, lighting, air conditioning, hot & cold water and waste water storage. Our CARTs can roll up on an incident scene and instantly house numerous small animals taking that issue off the long list of concerns of any Incident Commander. We hope to have these trailers displayed at public events throughout the Commonwealth this year. If any committee member would like to see these trailers or any PASART equipment, I would be happy to make those arrangements.

Everyone involved in the PA State Animal Response Team and its County Animal Response Teams is a volunteer, except for our Executive Director. From its inception until about 2012, funding was available through grants from the US DHS to pay that salary, equipment acquisitions, training of volunteers, accounting expenses, and insurance costs. That funding got the program off the ground, but it has dried up. PASART is a 501c3 charitable organization under the IRS code, and all involved are actively engaged in seeking donations and grants from private sources. The donation income is hard to predict and quite variable.

The leading funding concern is the insurance coverage PASART maintains on its volunteers. Secondary medical coverage has been maintained such that any unpaid medical expenses, resulting from a deployment, are covered after the volunteer has exhausted their own health insurance coverage. Some basic coverage is also carried for our volunteer Board of Directors such as liability and errors & omissions.

Such an expansive state-wide program needs an active director at the helm. Someone who can seek out future grant opportunities, deal with organizational issues at the county level and sit in the PEMA Emergency Operations Center during a crisis. Since 2012, the current Executive Director of PASART, Joel Hersh, has been acting without compensation due to the loss of grant funding. He would however, like to retire this year, so PASART would need to undertake a search for a new Executive Director. This will be a nearly impossible task without a salary to offer.

As with any government funding, full accounting must be provided for the use of the public's money. Some funding is needed for accounting fees to assure proper presentation of the books to you on this committee and any auditors, public or private, from whom funds have been obtained.

These are the sources of the funding request of approximately \$250,000 annually previously presented to PEMA by PASART.

As you can see, there is a comprehensive and compelling case for the value of the Pennsylvania State Animal Response Team to the citizens of the Commonwealth. A significant investment has been made to date in equipment and training, both in dollars and in volunteer hours. While the PA Federation of Dog Clubs completely understands the fiscal constraints currently faced by all in the Commonwealth, it seems to us that the loss of this investment due to a lack of operational funding going forward, would be a huge loss for our constituent organizations and all the citizens, their pets and domestic livestock of PA. We urge the members of this committee to provide funding to keep the Pennsylvania State Animal Response Team alive.

I thank you Chairman Barrar for this opportunity to speak before the committee. I will now gladly respond to any question committee members may have.