



# CITY OF HOUSTON

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April 22, 2025

The Honorable Jeff Leach  
Chair, House Committee on Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence  
Texas House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 12068  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Chairman Leach and Members of the Committee,

The City of Houston is writing to formally express our opposition to H.B. 4777, which seeks to impose liability on various animal shelters, including for-profit, non-profit and municipal entities, for loss, injury, or death of an owned animal while in its care.

While we recognize the importance of ensuring the welfare of animals in shelters, we believe that the provisions of this bill are deeply concerning and could have unintended negative consequences for both the shelters and the broader communities they serve. Specifically, we are concerned about the following aspects:

1. **Unclear language and Excessive Burden:** The defense to liability outlined in the bill is overly vague, creating an unrealistic and burdensome requirement for shelters to conduct potentially costly postmortem investigations. In many cases, the shelters would be forced to spend thousands of dollars to determine the cause of death, which could have been avoided if the bill had provided more concrete criteria for what constitutes an acceptable defense. This opens the door for significant financial hardship on already underfunded shelters, many of which operate on shoestring budgets.
2. **Circumstantial Evidence and Lack of Expert Testimony:** The bill allows for causation to be established through circumstantial evidence alone, without any requirement for expert testimony, such as that from a veterinarian. This could lead to frivolous claims and legal challenges, placing shelters in a vulnerable position where they may not be able to defend themselves adequately. Without expert testimony, decisions may be based on subjective interpretations of the facts, rather than the objective standards that professionals in the field would provide.
3. **Imposing Responsibility on Shelters, Not Pet Owners:** H.B. 4777 places undue responsibility on shelters for circumstances that may arise due to pet owner negligence or carelessness, such as when an animal is found off-leash or lost and brought to the shelter. Pet ownership comes with inherent responsibilities, and it is unreasonable to expect shelters to bear the financial and legal burden for the actions of irresponsible pet owners. It is crucial that the responsibility for the animal's well-being remains with the owner, particularly when it comes to situations like loss or injury caused by negligence.
4. **Financial Impact on Shelters:** Many shelters, particularly those operating on limited budgets, may not have the financial resources to cover potential damages or legal fees should they lose a case under this bill. The bill's provisions for damages, which include significant amounts for lost or injured animals, are disproportionate and could lead to financial instability for shelters already struggling to meet the needs of the animals in their care.

Council Members: Amy Peck Tarsha Jackson Abbie Kamin Carolyn Evans-Shabazz Joaquin Martinez Tiffany Thomas Julian Ramirez Mary Nan Huffman Fred Flickinger Mario Castillo Edward Pollard Martha Castex-Tatum Willie Davis Twila Carter Letitia Plummer Sallie Alcorn  
Controller: Chris Hollins

5. Lack of Consideration for Pet Ownership Responsibilities: The bill fails to adequately account for shared responsibility between the pet owners and shelters. While shelters do provide a crucial service in caring for lost or injured animals, it is essential that pet owners are held accountable for the proper care and control of their animals. The lack of personal accountability in the bill for pet owners could undermine the integrity of responsible pet ownership. Additionally, the affirmative defense outlined in the bill appears to only apply to a health condition of which the pet owner gives the shelter notice. This provision both places a burden on a shelter for the results of health conditions of which the pet owner should reasonably inform the shelter but neglects to do so, and may incentivize pet owners to keep shelters uninformed, or underinformed, of the health conditions of animals for which they are providing services.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the committee to reconsider the provisions of H.B. 4777. The bill, as currently written, poses significant risks to shelters and could inadvertently undermine the important work they do in caring for and protecting animals. We encourage lawmakers to revisit the bill and consider a more balanced approach that does not place undue financial and legal burdens on shelters, while still promoting responsible pet ownership and animal welfare.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully submitted,



Jarrad Mears,  
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BARC Shelter Director  
City of Houston