

Illinois Emergency Veterinary Care Bill Goes to Governor

Good Samaritan Bill protects citizens who help animals during disasters.

By Soraya Gutierrez

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A new bill would allow anyone in Illinois to help a cat or other animal in need of treatment, without fear of legal repercussions. Individuals who come to the rescue of an injured animal during a disaster or emergency will be able to do so without fear of a lawsuit under the Good Samaritan Bill, which unanimously passed the Illinois Senate.

Illinois House Bill 5076, sponsored by Rep. Sara Feigenholtz and Sen. John Cullerton, states that any person who in good faith provides free emergency care to an animal is not liable for civil damages, except for in cases involving willful or wanton misconduct. The bill now goes to the governor for approval.

The legislation was crafted in the wake of the Hurricane Katrina disaster in the Gulf Coast, said Chris Coleman, Cullerton's chief of staff. Thousands of dogs and cats were stranded with no food or shelter and when people wanted to help, some pet owners tried to sue if their animals were injured, Coleman said.

This bill allows anyone in Illinois who sees a dog or cat in need of treatment to be able to step in and help the animal without fear of legal repercussions, he said, provided that the intent of the citizen is honorable. Eighteen states already have Good Samaritan provisions protecting individuals who rescue animals from emergency situations or disasters.

HB 5076 is expected to arrive at the governor's desk this week, and he will have 60 days to review the bill. If approved, the bill goes into effect immediately upon becoming law.