

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

August 13, 2026

The Honorable Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Acting Comptroller General Orice Williams Brown:

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) undertake a study to examine and assess the enforcement of the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act of 2006¹ the challenges associated with reuniting household pets with their owners following federally declared disasters, and to identify opportunities for improving outcomes through better data, standards, and coordination.

During natural disasters, the separation of pets from their families is a persistent and consequential issue. Faced with minimal time and resources, pet owners are forced to choose between leaving their pets behind, risking their own safety, or limited sheltering options with their animals. These are life and death decisions that affect not only individuals and their pets, but also emergency responders, state and local officials, and entire communities trying to evacuate in the chaos of a disaster.

During several recent natural disasters, we have seen the scope and impact of this problem nationwide. Following Hurricane Helene in September 2024, which decimated parts of Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina, animal shelters² and organizations³ supported large numbers of displaced pets and owners. In January 2025, when the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires⁴ displaced thousands of families across Los Angeles County, many residents had to evacuate without their pets, as frightened animals hid or could not be safely retrieved. During the July 2025 floods in Central Texas⁵, hundreds of missing pets were reported, and shelter staff worked to identify deceased animals in an effort to provide closure to families. Most recently, in October 2025, evacuees from remote Alaskan villages impacted by Typhoon Halong⁶ were forced to leave

¹ [Public Law No: 109-308](#)

² WPTV: [Humane Society of Treasure Coast overwhelmed with displaced pets since hurricane](#)

³ ASPCA: [Recognizing the One-Year Anniversary of Hurricane Helene](#)

⁴ LA Times: [Burned and anxious pets fill Pasadena shelter after Eaton fire](#)

⁵ NPR: [After Texas flooding, volunteers help reunite pets with owners](#)

⁶ Alaska Public Media: [Dog evacuations continue from Western Alaska villages hit hard by remnants of Typhoon Halong](#)

pets behind during emergency airlifts, prompting volunteer-led efforts⁷ to transport animals to Anchorage and reunite them with their owners.

Practitioners working in disaster animal response consistently report several recurring challenges. Many pets lack proper identification, such as microchips or tags, complicating efforts to match animals with their owners. Communication barriers between shelters, rescuers, emergency management agencies, and the public often delay or prevent reunification. In addition, many jurisdictions lack standardized policies—such as extended hold times for disaster-displaced animals—resulting in animals being rehomed or transferred before owners have a reasonable opportunity to locate them. These gaps contribute to delayed reunifications, increased operational costs, and diminished public trust. Many of these issues could be avoided through consistent animal-inclusive disaster planning and preparedness activities. More broadly, there is no consistently implemented national baseline for disaster animal intake, tracking, and reunification data. Information is collected across jurisdictions and organizations in disparate formats with varying levels of completeness. This limits situational awareness, hinders coordination, and reduces accountability. Despite the frequency of these issues, there has not been a comprehensive analysis of their scope, causes, and potential solutions. Accordingly, we respectfully request that GAO examine the following key issues:

Existing Data Sets and Best Practices

Stakeholders have emphasized the need for improved data collection and analysis to better understand the root causes of pet-owner separation during disasters and the scale of this problem. We ask GAO to examine what data is currently collected by federal, state, local, and nonprofit entities for disaster animal intake, sheltering, and reunification, and how consistent these data are across jurisdictions and incidents. GAO should also assess the measurable impacts of standardized data collection on outcomes such as time-to-reunification, shelter length of stay, cost per animal-day, reunification rates, safety incidents, and public complaints.

Collaboration and Communications Between Stakeholders

Although the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act of 2006⁸ requires state and local disaster plans to address the needs of individuals with pets and service animals, gaps in implementation remain. Animal response operations vary widely in their integration into emergency management frameworks, including coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and in the interoperability of systems used by government and nonprofit partners. Limited trained personnel, weak coordination amongst staff, and delayed deployments of trained staff or volunteers further hinder response during disaster scenarios. We

⁷ Humane Word for Animals: [Our Animal Rescue Team arrives in typhoon-stricken Alaska](#)

⁸ [Public Law No: 109-308](#)

ask GAO to assess these challenges, determine if effective disaster planning and preparedness activities have been implemented, and identify best practices to improve coordination, communication, and resource utilization.

Disaster Specific Evaluations

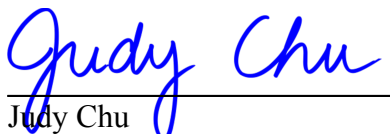
GAO's review should prioritize lessons learned and after-action reports from recent disasters including Hurricane Helene in the Southeastern United States, flooding in Central Texas, the Eaton and Palisades fires in California, and Typhoon Halong in Alaska. Through targeted case studies examining state and local shelter data, emergency management plans, and stakeholder interviews, GAO should identify common challenges, effective practices, and recurring gaps across disaster responses.

Based on its research, we ask GAO to identify actions the federal government could take to improve reunification outcomes, as well as animal-inclusive disaster preparedness, including establishing minimum data and reporting standards, providing technical assistance, and incentivizing implementation through preparedness funding or pilot programs. We also ask for recommendations for addressing gaps between planning and practice to better understand the root causes for separation and ultimately reduce the risk of pets and families becoming separated.

Improving animal-inclusive disaster planning and the reunification of pets and their owners following disasters is not only a matter of animal welfare, but also of public safety, emergency management effectiveness, and community resilience. Clearer standards, better data, and stronger coordination can reduce costs, improve outcomes, and ensure that families are not permanently separated from their pets in times of crisis.

We appreciate your attention to this request. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Rep. Judy Chu's staff at 202-225-5464. We look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

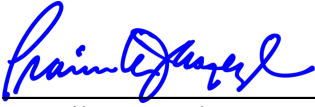


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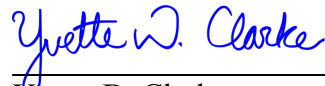
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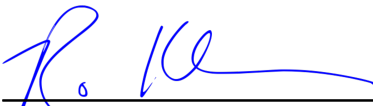
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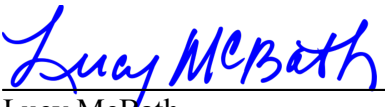


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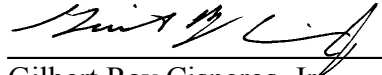


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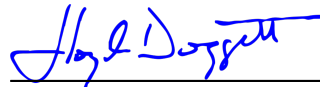
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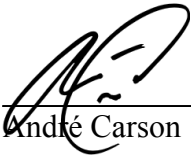
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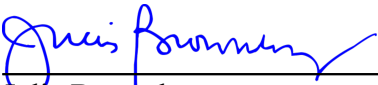
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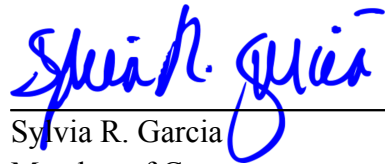
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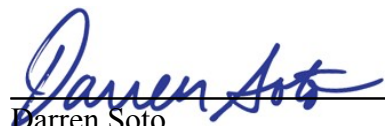
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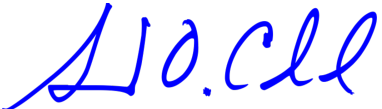
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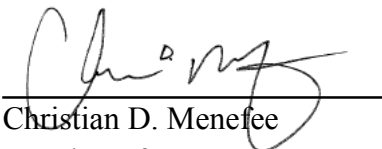
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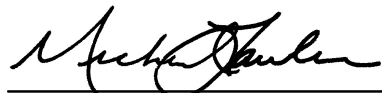
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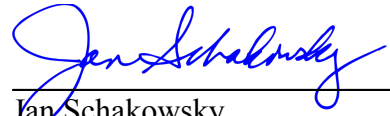
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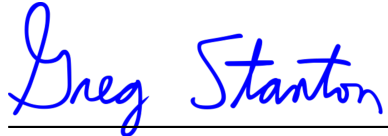
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Melanie Stansbury
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