



American Foreign Service Association

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The Honorable Patrick M. Kennedy
Under Secretary for Management
Department of State

Dear Under Secretary Kennedy:

Several months ago, during the course of the evacuation and ordered departure of Embassy Cairo, AFSA and department management embarked on a discussion about current evacuation policy and the evacuation of domestic pets in the event of ordered/authorized departures.

As the issue is more complex than it may appear, it was suggested that AFSA craft a proposal that would be both responsive to the concerns of our membership and workable for the Department. We did some research, and benefited greatly from an informal conversation with Steve Hartman, Ed Brennan and Ann Coughlin in A/LM/OPS. We understand that safeguarding domestic animals in the event of an evacuation entails serious responsibilities for the pet owners as well as the department, and we have included specific provisions enumerating owner responsibilities. Proactive preparation by Foreign Service pet owners, facilitated and encouraged by the department, is a critical element in minimizing the burden on post in the event of an evacuation.

We also believe that FSI can play a positive role in ensuring that Management officers anticipate and make contingency plans for pets in the event of an evacuation. And, finally, post management should, to the maximum extent possible, facilitate the safe departure of pets when the owners must depart suddenly.

We hope the attached proposal will serve as a starting point for a constructive dialogue on an issue that is of great importance to a significant portion of our membership and for which we believe there is strong business case for better preparation and planning. We look forward to meeting with you for further discussion on the topic at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan R. Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Susan R. Johnson
AFSA President

Cc: Nancy Powell, Director General of the Foreign Service
Steve Polson, Chief Labor Management Relations

Recommendations for a Foreign Service Pet Evacuation Policy

Recent mission evacuations from Egypt, Libya, Japan, and other countries have highlighted the need for a proactive solution to the recurring problem of mission household pet evacuations. Current official Department of State policy allowing for exclusion of pets from evacuation is out of step with U.S. legal and societal standards for animal care, and negatively impacts the Department, missions, employees, and members of household. A revised pet evacuation policy will help:

1) Enhance Department and post focus on critical emergency tasks

Anecdotal evidence from the Cairo evacuation and the January 2011 AFSA pet survey (which elicited nearly 2700 responses) indicate that *when pets are left behind, resources are diverted from mission-critical Department tasks*. Employees remaining at post provide much of the care for animals left behind; employees forced to evacuate without their pets expend significant effort trying to arrange for their repatriation or arrange for their care. In the case of Cairo, the responsibility for documenting, collecting, and transporting more than 150 individual pets eventually fell not to their owners, but to a handful of mission-essential personnel attempting to care for and handle the evacuation of these pets.

2) Bring Department policy into conformity with U.S. legal and societal norms on animal care

The Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006 (PETS Act), signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 6, 2006, requires local and state emergency preparedness operational plans to address the needs of individuals with household pets and authorizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide rescue for individuals and their household pets. Congress passed the PETS Act following public and media outrage at owners being forced to abandon their pets to access life-saving transportation and shelter. One post-Katrina survey found that 44% of people who did not evacuate chose not to do so because they refused to leave their animals. There is evidence that similar concerns motivated people in Japan not to avail themselves of evacuation charters provided to assist those interested in authorized departure.

3) Contribute to Positive Public Perception of the Department

In the wake of the Cairo evacuations, the Humane Society of the United States and the Humane Society International contacted AFSA after hearing from distraught Foreign Service pet owners. The Huffington Post, on February 4, 2011, also reported "U.S. Citizens Forced to Abandon Their Dogs in Egypt," a story

which garnered 200 comments and 2000 “likes.” The author wrote, “Have we learned nothing from Hurricane Katrina? For Americans and compassionate people around the world, dogs and cats are members of the family...The people fleeing Egypt have already had their lives turned upside down. It’s a low blow for their own country to put them through the heartache and stress of leaving their animal family members behind and wondering what will happen to them.”

4) Support health and morale of employees and members of household

Research on pets in Katrina and other disasters has documented that leaving a companion animal behind in a disaster can pose additional health risks to evacuees already under serious strain. Because people develop a relationship of mutual dependence with companion animals as well as with service animals, evacuating these animals is part of caring for the needs of people.

Recent surveys show 173.8 million household pets in the United States. Fifty percent of owners in a recent poll agreed with the statement “my pet is just as much a part of the family as any other person in my household.” Foreign Service personnel mirror American society. In a January 2011 AFSA pet survey, which received 2,597 responses, 58% of respondents indicated their pet’s needs were “very important” when bidding on an assignment, while an additional 33% said their pet’s needs were “somewhat important.”

In the same survey, 67% of respondents who had experienced a post evacuation said arrangements for pets were not adequate. The 33% of respondents who had positive post evacuation experiences cited specific cases where an Ambassador, GSO, or other individual at post chose to champion the cause of pet evacuation.

AFSA, following consultation with the Humane Society of the United States, Humane Society International, the Washington Humane Society, the Animal Welfare Institute, FLO and the Foreign Affairs Friends of Animals Network, proposes the following Foreign Service Pet and Service Animal Evacuation Policy.

1. Evacuation Preparedness

a. Pet Owners

Mission employees are responsible for their household pets being fully prepared at all times for evacuation. This includes agreeing in writing to terms similar to the recommendations currently posted on the Department of State Family Liaison Office page, including:

- i. Have immediately available for each pet– including those adopted locally - medical records, identification, a 30-day supply of any required medication, and an airline-approved hard-sided kennel with properly functioning latch.
- ii. Ensure that vaccinations for each pet are current – for host country, US, and most likely transit country/countries.
- iii. Based on mission-provided information regarding charter transportation providers and destination countries that are best prepared to accommodate household pets in emergency evacuations (per item b. below), take responsibility for meeting in advance administrative and medical requirements such as microchipping, vaccinations, etc.
- iv. Identify in advance at least one local caretaker, to be called upon in the event that efforts to evacuate the pet are not successful.
- v. Identify in advance at least one individual in the United States to whom the pet can be sent.
- vi. Inform Mission Pet Evacuation Action Officer (see below) of the number and size of all pets in the household, updating this information as necessary throughout the tour.

b. Missions

Missions are responsible for maintaining a roster of employee household pets as part of emergency planning activity, including all of the information in item (a) above, subject to provision of information by mission employees.

Missions are responsible for amending Emergency Action Plans and mission website guidance to include the evacuation of household pets. This planning will include advance designation of a post Pet Evacuation Action Officer, and maintenance of current information about destination/transit countries that are best prepared to accommodate household pets.

If an evacuation appears imminent, the Pet Evacuation Action Officer will immediately begin discussions with A/LM/OPS/TTM about the size and needs of the Mission's pet population. He/she will simultaneously contact registered pet owners at post, encouraging them to be proactive in making advance (independent) arrangements for their pets – to include shipment to a safe haven in advance of a voluntary/ordered departure.

Missions are responsible to concurrently prepare for an event in which pet evacuation arrangements cannot be immediately accomplished by:

- i. Maintaining a list of known vets, kennels and potential caretakers (including volunteers among locally employed staff) in the local community.
- ii. Identifying a means to transfer money from outside the country directly to animal shippers and caretakers in the country.

Missions are responsible for maintaining a written plan for periodically informing personnel and members of household about pet evacuation policies and procedures.

c. Foreign Service Institute

The School of Professional and Area Studies at the Foreign Service Institute will ensure that training for General Services Officers, Management Officers and Family Liaison Officers incorporates these procedures and the requirement to include household pets in evacuation planning. The Orientation Division of SPAS will ensure that new employees are informed of their responsibilities for their pets before, during and after an evacuation. The Transition Center will appropriately modify its pet ownership materials and the contents of its “Traveling With Pets” course.

2. Evacuation Implementation

a. Pet Owners

Mission employees will be financially responsible for all transportation costs for their household pets such as may be involved in case of commercial flights (bi) or in case of dedicated pet charters (biii). They may be required to sign payment agreements in advance of services rendered.

b. Missions

Missions will facilitate the evacuation of Mission household pets to the maximum extent practicable. This includes the following:

i. Evacuation by air – commercial flights

Post will assist employees in taking small household pets in carry-on bags or in arranging shipment of larger household pets as excess baggage or via air cargo in climate-controlled compartments consistent with normal transportation practices.

ii. Evacuation by air – charter flights

Subject to approval by air crew (requested in advance of charter), employees will be allowed to transport small household pets in carry-on bags or larger household pets in climate-controlled compartments. To the maximum extent possible, charter flights should be equipped to transport larger household pets

via climate-controlled compartments. Post will advise A/LM/OPS/TTM of the size and nature of the Mission's pet population.

iii. Evacuation by dedicated pet charter flight:

If the number of registered pets at post merits, the Department may facilitate a dedicated pet evacuation charter for Mission employees, if pet owners are willing to collectively guarantee payment of the costs.

iv. Evacuation by land or sea

When evacuating by land or sea and/or transporting mission personnel to air evacuation departure points, sufficient space in mission vehicles will be allotted for transportation of household pets and service animals to the maximum extent possible.

v. Use of luggage space for household pets

In cases of space limitation, pet owners may be required to forego designated luggage space in order to secure space for pet carriers.

vi. Clear danger exception

The Chief of Mission or designee will inform the Department and employees when the diversion of resources for evacuation of household pets represents a clear danger to human safety. The Chief of Mission or designee may also prohibit the return of employees to mission residences to collect pets, and/or personal belongings in cases of clear and present danger.

ⁱ Per <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/government/grant/pa/policy.pdf>, "household pet" is defined as a "domesticated animal, such as a dog, cat, bird, rabbit, rodent, or turtle that is traditionally kept in the home for pleasure rather than for commercial purposes, can travel in commercial carriers, and be housed in temporary facilities. Household pets do not include reptiles (except turtles), amphibians, fish, insects/arachnids, farm animals (including horses), and animals kept for racing purposes."