New State Law Impacts California Animal Rescues

In California law, "animal rescue group" is defined as a nonprofit organization with a tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, whose operation is in whole or significant part, the rescue and placement of animals into permanent homes AND meets BOTH of the following:

- Does not breed animals.
- Does not obtain animals in exchange for payment or compensation from any person that breeds or brokers animals.

With the recent passage of Assembly Bill 519, entities that don't meet the entire definition of "animal rescue group" could be treated as a broker of dogs. Beginning January 1, 2026, brokers dealing in puppies under the age of 12 months will no longer be able to operate legally in the state of California.

Specifically, AB 519 bans "brokering" of dogs for profit in the state with exceptions for dogs over the age of 12 months; service, guide, or signal dogs; and the transfer of a dog to a government agency. An additional exemption allows the bona fide owner of dogs to transfer up to three dogs per calendar year without conditions.

Although not subject to additional regulations placed on certain dog breeders, if you operate an animal rescue in California today, you – like any resident –are subject to animal cruelty laws.

Recent passage of Assembly Bill 506, which also takes effect January 1, 2026, further requires that animal rescues "selling" dogs, cats, or rabbits to be subject to consumer protection and disclosure requirements such as health, vaccination, microchip information (Note: this new law does not require animal rescues to perform additional services to their animals, only to disclose what or what has not been done.)

More information about mandatory disclosures is available here.