

21. Caring for Pets

If you are at risk of being detained or deported, you may be worried about what will happen to your pets. Pets are important members of many families, and making arrangements for their care is a key component of planning for detention or deportation. This chapter provides guidance on how to plan ahead for your pets, what legal documents you may need, and what options may be available to you. This chapter addresses the following issues:

What Challenges Do Pet Owners Face During Detention/Deportation, and Why Should You Plan Ahead? > What Happens to Pets if You Are Detained/Deported? > Planning Pet Care Arrangements Before Detention or Deportation > Additional Pet Caretaker Planning – Options and Alternatives > Legal Documents and Authorizations > Financial Considerations > Exporting Pets Internationally > Resources and Organizations > Checklist: Caring for Pets During Owner’s Detention or Deportation

Each Chapter is intended to provide generalized information on a particular topic. In many cases, laws may differ from state to state. Therefore, this information is not intended to replace state-specific legal assistance. Nothing in this manual is intended to create an attorney-client or fiduciary relationship.

What Challenges Do Pet Owners Face During Detention/Deportation, and Why Should You Plan Ahead?

Detention or deportation can happen suddenly and without much warning. If you have pets, this can create an immediate crisis. You may not have time to make arrangements for your pets before you are taken into custody. If no one is available to care for your pets, they may be left alone in your home or apartment, or they may be taken by animal control. **Planning ahead is the best way to protect your pets and ensure they are cared for if you are detained or deported.**

Because personal rights and property rights may be very limited once a person is detained or deported, it is best to establish plans for your pets in advance. You should carefully discuss your plans with the people who may be involved in caring for your pets in your absence. The more preparation you do in advance, the better the outcome is likely to be for your pets.

Pets as property under U.S. law

Under U.S. law, pets are generally considered personal property. This means that, like other personal property, you have the right to decide what happens to your pets. You can transfer ownership of your pets to another person, authorize someone to care for your pets on your behalf, or make other arrangements. However, because pets are living animals, there are also animal welfare laws that may apply. If your pets are left without care, animal control authorities may take them. It is important to make arrangements for your pets before you are detained or deported.

What Happens to Pets If You Are Detained or Deported?

If you are detained suddenly, you may not have time to make arrangements for your pets. This section describes what may happen to your pets if you are detained or deported, and what steps you can take to protect them.

You have several options, which are described below. The best option for you will depend on your individual circumstances, including the type of pet you have, your financial situation, and whether you plan to return to the United States.

When You Do Not Have an Emergency Pet Care Plan:

Pets left in rental properties and landlord coordination

If you rent your home or apartment, your lease may have provisions about pets. If you are detained or deported and your pet is left in your rental property, your landlord may have the right to remove the pet after a certain period of time. You should arrange for your pet caretaker to retrieve your pet from your home as quickly as possible. You should also consider informing your landlord of your situation and asking them to cooperate with your caretaker. If possible, give your caretaker a key to your home in advance so they can access it quickly in an emergency.

Animal control and shelter procedures

If your pet is left without care and no one is available to retrieve them, animal control authorities may take your pet to a local animal shelter. Animal control procedures vary by city and county. In general, animal control officers have the authority to enter a property and remove an animal that appears to be abandoned or in distress. Once your pet is taken to a shelter, the shelter will hold your pet for a period of time before making them available for adoption or, in some cases, euthanizing them. You should contact your local animal control authority to find out the specific procedures and time limits in your area.

Time limits for retrieving pets

If your pet is taken to an animal shelter, there is usually a limited period of time during which you or your caretaker can retrieve your pet before the shelter makes them available for adoption or takes other action. This period varies by jurisdiction but is often between three and seven days for stray animals, and may be longer for owner-surrendered animals. You should contact your local animal shelter as soon as possible to find out the time limits that apply, and to arrange for your caretaker to retrieve your pet. Your caretaker may need to provide proof of ownership, such as vaccination records or a microchip registration, to retrieve your pet.

Costs and fees for shelter care or boarding

If your pet is taken to an animal shelter or boarding facility, there may be fees for the care your pet receives while in their custody. These fees may include daily boarding fees, veterinary care fees, and redemption fees. You should be aware of these potential costs and make financial arrangements in advance to ensure that your caretaker has access to funds to pay them. If you are unable to pay the fees, you should contact the shelter to discuss your options, as some shelters may waive or reduce fees in cases of financial hardship.

When You Do Have an Emergency Pet Care Plan:

Notifying back up/emergency caretakers of detention

If you are detained, it is important to notify a trusted caretaker as quickly as possible. You should ask the ICE officer to allow you to make a phone call to your pet caretaker. If you are unable to reach your pet caretaker, you should try to reach your backup caretaker or another trusted friend or family member. You should give your caretaker the following information:

- That you have been detained and the name and location of the facility where you are being held;
- Instructions to follow your emergency pet care plan; and
- Any other information your caretaker needs to access your home and care for your pet.

Planning Pet Care Arrangements Before Detention or Deportation

If you believe you are at risk of being detained or deported, you should begin making arrangements for your pets as soon as possible. The steps below can help you prepare.

Preliminary Planning for Emergency Caretakers in Case of Detention or Deportation of Pet Owners

1. Identifying trusted caretakers for your pets

The most important step is to identify a person you trust who is willing and able to care for your pets if you are detained or deported. This person should be someone who is familiar with your pets and who has the time, space, and financial resources to care for them. You should speak with this person in advance and make sure they understand and agree to take on this responsibility. It is also a good idea to identify a backup pet caretaker in case your first choice is unavailable. Make sure both caretakers have each other's contact information.

2. Emergency contact information and care plans

You should prepare an emergency contact list that includes the names and contact information of your pet caretaker, your backup caretaker, and your veterinarian. Share this list with your caretaker and keep a copy with your pet's documents. You should also prepare a written emergency care plan that explains what your caretaker should do if your pet becomes ill or injured, including when to seek veterinary care and how to pay for it.

3. Creating written care instructions

You should prepare written care instructions for your pets and give a copy to your pet caretaker(s). These instructions should include:

- Your pet's name, breed, age, and any identifying information (such as microchip number or license number);
- Your pet's dietary requirements, including the type and amount of food, feeding schedule, and any food allergies or restrictions;
- Your pet's medical needs, including any medications, dosages, and schedules;
- Your pet's behavioral information, including any known fears, triggers, or special needs;
- The name and contact information of your veterinarian;
- Any emergency contact information and care plan in case of illness or injury; and
- Any other information that would help a caretaker provide proper care for your pet.

4. Gathering essential documents

You should gather all important documents related to your pets and keep them in a safe and accessible location. You should also give copies to your caretaker.

Important documents include:

- Vaccination records, including rabies vaccination certificates;
- Medical history and records from your veterinarian;
- Microchip registration information and the name of the microchip registry;
- Pet license information;
- Any import or export documentation if you plan to travel internationally with your pet; and
- Contact information for your veterinarian and any specialists.

5. Updating vaccinations

Make sure your pet's vaccinations are up-to-date. This is especially important if you plan to travel internationally with your pet or if you are transferring your pet to a new caretaker. Up-to-date vaccinations are also required by many boarding facilities and shelters. Contact your veterinarian to confirm which vaccinations your pet needs and to obtain updated vaccination records.

6. Consider discussing and addressing spaying/neutering your pet with your pet's veterinarian

If your pet has not been spayed or neutered, you may want to discuss this with your caretaker and/or veterinarian. Spaying or neutering your pet can make it easier to find a caretaker or a new home for your pet, and can reduce the risk of your pet producing offspring that cannot be cared for. Many low-cost spay and neuter services are available through local humane societies and animal welfare organizations. See the [Resources and Organizations](#) section of this chapter for more information.

Additional Pet Caretaker Planning – Options and Alternatives

Keeping Pets with Family/Friends in the U.S.

If you have family members or friends in the United States who are willing and able to care for your pets, this is often the best option. Your pets will remain in a familiar environment and will be cared for by people who know them. You should speak with your caretaker in advance and make sure they understand and agree to take on this responsibility. You should also make financial arrangements to help cover the cost of your pet's care.

Selecting appropriate caretakers

When selecting a caretaker for your pet, you should consider:

- Whether the person has experience caring for pets, and specifically for the type of pet you have;
- Whether the person has adequate space and resources to care for your pet;
- Whether the person's living situation (for example, their lease or homeowner's association rules) permits them to have a pet;
- Whether the person is willing to commit to caring for your pet for as long as necessary; and
- Whether the person is someone you fully trust to act in your pet's best interests.

Long-term vs. temporary arrangements

You should think carefully about whether you want your caretaker to care for your pet on a temporary or long-term basis. If you plan to return to the United States or to bring your pet to your home country in the future, a temporary arrangement may be appropriate. If you do not plan to return or are uncertain about your future plans, a longer-term or permanent arrangement may be more appropriate. Whatever you decide, you should **put the arrangement in writing** and make sure both you and your pet caretaker understand the terms. See [Legal Documents and Authorizations](#) section of this Chapter, below.

Rehoming Through Adoption

If you are unable to find a family member or friend to care for your pet, you may consider rehoming your pet through adoption. This means finding a new permanent home for your pet with another family or individual. There are several ways to do this, as described below.

Working with animal shelters and rescue organizations; Surrender/relinquishment of pet procedures

If you need to surrender your pet to a shelter, animal shelters and rescue organizations can help you find a new home for your pet. Many shelters and rescue centers will accept owner-surrendered pets and work to find them new homes. You should contact your local animal shelter or rescue organization as early as possible to find out their procedures, as many have waiting lists or limited space, and may require appointments for owner surrenders. When you contact a shelter or rescue, be prepared to provide information about your pet, including their age, breed, health history, vaccination records, behavior and temperament. Some shelters and rescue centers may charge a surrender fee. You should bring all of your pet's documents, supplies, and any medications when you surrender your pet. If possible, you should also bring your pet's favorite toys or bedding to help them adjust to their new environment.

Private adoption considerations

You may also be able to find a new home for your pet through private adoption, for example by posting an advertisement online or through word of mouth. If you choose this option, you should screen potential adopters carefully to make sure they are able to provide a good home for your pet. You should ask about their experience with pets, their living situation, and their plans for the pet. You should also prepare a written adoption agreement that identifies the pet, names the new owner, and states that you are transferring ownership of the pet. Both you and the new owner should sign and date the agreement. One such resource is <https://rehome.adoptapet.com>.

Taking Your Pet With You Internationally

See the section on [Exporting Pets Internationally](#) for more information.

Legal Documents and Authorizations

There are several legal documents you may want to prepare in advance to ensure that your caretaker has the legal authority to care for your pets and make decisions on your behalf. This section describes the most important documents.

Power of Attorney for Pet Care

A power of attorney ("POA") is a written document that allows you (the "principal") to authorize another person (the "agent") to act on your behalf. You can use a limited or special power of attorney to give your caretaker the authority to make decisions about your pet's care. For example, a POA for pet care can give your caretaker the authority to:

- Authorize veterinary treatment and make medical decisions for your pet;
- Pay for veterinary care and other expenses using funds you have set aside;
- Transfer ownership of your pet to another person, if necessary; and
- Take any other actions necessary to care for your pet.

See [Chapter 9](#) of this manual for more information about powers of attorney.

Authorization for veterinary treatment and medical decisions

Even without a formal power of attorney, you can sign a written authorization allowing your caretaker to seek veterinary treatment for your pet. Many veterinarians will require written authorization before treating a pet that is not brought in by its owner. You should ask your veterinarian whether they have a standard authorization form, or you can prepare a simple written statement that identifies your pet, names your caretaker, and authorizes the caretaker to consent to veterinary treatment on your behalf. This document should be signed and dated by you, and you should give a copy to your caretaker and to your veterinarian.

Transfer of Ownership Documents

If you decide to permanently transfer ownership of your pet to another person, you should prepare a written transfer of ownership document. This document should identify your pet (including any microchip number or license number), identify the new owner, and state that you are transferring ownership of the pet to that person. Both you and the new owner should sign and date the document. You should also update your pet's microchip registration and license to reflect the new owner's information.

Temporary vs. permanent transfer

You will need to decide whether you want to transfer ownership of your pet permanently or temporarily. A permanent transfer means that you are giving up all rights to your pet and the new owner will have full legal ownership. A temporary transfer means that you are giving physical possession of your pet to another person for a period of time, with the expectation that you will reclaim your pet in the future. If you are making a temporary transfer, you should put the agreement in writing, signed and dated by both parties, and clearly state that the transfer is temporary and that you retain ownership of the pet.

Updating microchip registration and pet licenses

If you transfer ownership of your pet, either temporarily or permanently, you should update your pet's microchip registration and pet license to reflect the new caretaker's or owner's contact information. This is important because if your pet is lost, or found by animal control, the microchip registry will be used to identify and contact the owner. Contact the microchip registry directly to update the registration. You can usually do this online or by phone. You should also contact your local animal control authority to update your pet's license.

Financial Considerations

Caring for a pet can be expensive. If you are detained or deported, you will need to make financial arrangements to ensure that your pet continues to receive proper care. This section describes some of the financial considerations you should keep in mind.

Ongoing pet care costs may include:

- ➔ Food and treats;
- ➔ Veterinary care, including routine checkups, vaccinations, and emergency care;
- ➔ Medications and supplements;
- ➔ Pet insurance premiums;
- ➔ Grooming;
- ➔ Boarding or daycare; and
- ➔ Supplies such as bedding, toys, and litter.

You should estimate these costs and make arrangements to ensure that your caretaker has access to sufficient funds to cover them. You should discuss these costs with your caretaker in advance and agree on how they will be managed.

Financial arrangements for ongoing expenses and care

You should make arrangements to help your caretaker cover the ongoing costs of caring for your pet. These costs may include food, veterinary care, medications, grooming, and other supplies. You should discuss these costs with your caretaker in advance and agree on how they will be covered.

Options include:

- ➔ Providing a lump sum of money up-front to your caregiver, setting up a regular transfer of funds, or on an as-needed/as-requested basis by the caretaker;
- ➔ Ordering food and medication online directly and having it shipped to the caretaker;
- ➔ Keeping a card on file with the veterinarian that is authorized for use, and making arrangements with your veterinarian to pay for anticipated care in advance; or
- ➔ Setting aside a sum of money in a separate dedicated pet care account and giving your caretaker access to that account through a financial power of attorney or by adding them as a joint account holder.
- ➔ See **Chapter 4** of this manual for more information about managing bank accounts, and **Chapter 9** for more information about powers of attorney.

You should choose the option that best fits your situation and that you are most comfortable with. Whatever option you choose, you should make sure your caretaker understands how to access the funds and what they may be used for relative to the pet.

Prepaid veterinary care plans

Some veterinary practices offer prepaid care plans or wellness plans that allow you to pay for anticipated veterinary services in advance. If your veterinarian offers such a plan, you may want to consider enrolling your pet before you are detained or deported. This can help ensure that your pet receives routine care even if your pet caretaker has limited

funds. You should ask your veterinarian about the details of any prepaid care plans they offer, including what services are covered and how your caretaker can access the plan.

Exporting Pets Internationally

If you plan to take your pet with you when you leave the United States, you will need to comply with U.S. export requirements, and the import requirements of your destination country. This process can be complicated and time-consuming, so you should begin planning as early as possible. In general, you will need to obtain a travel health certificate from a licensed veterinarian that is government approved to issue such travel health certificates, ensure your pet's vaccinations are up-to-date, and comply with any additional requirements of your destination country, such as microchipping, parasite treatment, or quarantine. You should begin researching the requirements for your destination country as early as possible, as some requirements must be met within a specific period prior to travel, which may be weeks or months before travel. This section provides an overview of the key requirements.

You should also consult the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services website at www.aphis.usda.gov/pet-travel for the most current U.S. related detailed information.

U.S. Export Requirements

The United States has requirements for exporting pets that you must meet before you can take your pet out of the country. The specific requirements depend on the type of pet you have, and your destination country.

USDA health certificates

To export most pets from the United States, you will need to obtain a pet travel health veterinary certificate issued by a licensed veterinarian that is endorsed by the USDA APHIS. The health certificate confirms that your pet has been examined by a veterinarian and is healthy and free of signs of communicable disease. The health certificate must be issued within a specific period before your travel date — often within ten (10) days — so you should schedule a veterinary appointment with a veterinarian that is certified to issue such pet travel health certificates close to your planned departure date. These veterinarians can help you obtain the appropriate health certificate for your destination country.

See the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services website at www.aphis.usda.gov/pet-travel for more information on taking a pet from the United States or into the United States.

Most countries require proof that your pet's vaccinations are current, particularly rabies vaccinations. You should make sure your pet's vaccinations are up-to-date well before your planned travel date, as some vaccinations must be given a certain number of days before travel is permitted. You should obtain official vaccination records from your veterinarian and carry them with you when you travel. Some countries may also require additional vaccinations or treatments, such as treatment for internal and external parasites.

Check the requirements for your specific destination country on the USDA APHIS website at www.aphis.usda.gov/pet-travel.

Vaccination requirements and documents

Destination country requirements

Each country has its own requirements for importing pets, and these requirements can change. You should research the requirements for your destination country as early as possible. Requirements may include:

- Microchipping (your pet may need to have an ISO-standard microchip);
- Specific vaccinations, including rabies;
- A health certificate issued by a licensed veterinarian that is endorsed by USDA APHIS;
- Treatment for internal and external parasites;
- A waiting period or quarantine upon arrival; and
- Specific documentation or permits.

Requirements can change, so you should check the current requirements for your destination country well in advance of your travel date.

For **Mexico**, importing a pet generally requires a health certificate issued by a licensed veterinarian that is endorsed by USDA APHIS, proof of a current rabies vaccination, and proof of treatment for internal and external parasites.

Further information for **Mexico** on importing pets can be found at the website of the Servicio Nacional de Sanidad, Inocuidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria (SENASICA) at <https://www.gob.mx/senasica>, or by contacting the Mexican consulate.

For other countries, the USDA APHIS website at www.aphis.usda.gov/pet-travel provides country-specific information. You may also contact the embassy or consulate of your destination country for the most current requirements.

Transportation Logistics

Once you have met the documentation requirements for exporting your pet, you will need to make arrangements for transporting your pet. The logistics of pet transport depend on the size and type of your pet, the airline you are using, and your destination country.

Airline-approved carriers, policies and costs

Some airlines allow small pets to travel in the cabin in an approved carrier, while others require pets to travel as checked baggage or cargo. Some airlines do not accept pets at all. If your pet will travel in the cabin of an aircraft, they must be transported in an airline-approved carrier that fits under the seat in front of you. Each airline has its own specifications for approved carriers, including size and construction requirements. You should check with your airline for their specific requirements before purchasing a carrier. If your pet is too large to travel in the cabin, they may need to travel as checked baggage or cargo in a larger, airline-approved crate. You should contact your airline well in advance to make arrangements and to find out what documentation they require for traveling with a pet. Be aware that airlines will likely charge fees for traveling with a pet, and that there may be restrictions on the breed, size, or number of pets allowed.

Resources and Organizations

There are many organizations that can help you with pet care, rehoming, and international pet transport. This section provides information about some of the resources available to you. While we do not endorse particular businesses or organizations, we believe it is important to provide examples of available resources.

Humane Society and ASPCA resources

The Humane Society and the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) are two of the largest animal welfare organizations in the United States. Both organizations offer a range of services that may be helpful to immigrants facing detention or deportation.

Humane Society

See your local city, county, region or state Humane Society website for details.

Humane Society locations may offer lower cost veterinary services, including spay/neuter surgeries and pet relinquishment services (giving up the pet) for individuals living in the service area of the applicable Humane Society, if this option becomes necessary or desirable.

ASPCA

The ASPCA maintains adoption and service locations in a few designated cities throughout the United States (see [aspca.org](https://www.asPCA.org) for more information).

Certain locations in the U.S. offer referrals or veterinary services for free or low cost spay/neuter surgeries, and for low cost veterinary services.

Breed-specific rescue groups

Many dog and cat breeds have dedicated rescue organizations that specialize in rehoming animals of that breed. If you have a purebred or mixed-breed pet, you may be able to find a breed-specific rescue organization that can help you find a new home for your pet. You can search for breed-specific rescue organizations online or ask your veterinarian for a referral.

USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is the federal agency in the United States responsible for regulating the export and import of animals, including pets. The USDA APHIS website at www.aphis.usda.gov/pet-travel provides detailed information on the requirements for taking a pet out of the United States and bringing a pet into the United States, including country-specific requirements. You can also contact USDA APHIS directly for assistance.

International pet transport services

There are companies that specialize in arranging international pet transport. These companies can help you navigate the documentation requirements, make travel arrangements, and ensure that your pet arrives safely at your destination. While we do not endorse particular businesses, you can find international pet transport companies by searching online. If you use such a service, make sure to verify that the company is reputable and experienced in transporting pets to your destination country.

Low-cost veterinary care and pet food banks

There are many organizations that offer low-cost veterinary care and other pet care resources to individuals who cannot afford full-price services. These include:

- Local humane societies and animal shelters, which often offer low-cost vaccination clinics, spay and neuter services, and other veterinary services;
- Nonprofit veterinary clinics and mobile veterinary units;
- Pet food banks, which provide free or low-cost pet food to individuals in need;
- Veterinary schools, which often offer services at a reduced cost; and
- You can find low-cost veterinary care resources in your area by contacting your local humane society, animal shelter, or by searching online.

Checklist: Caring for Pets During Owner's Deportation or Detention

The following checklist summarizes the key steps you should take to plan for your pets in the event of detention or deportation. You should review this checklist and take action on each item as soon as possible.

- ☐ Identify a trusted pet caretaker and a backup caretaker for your pets.
- ☐ Prepare written care instructions for your pets, including dietary requirements, medical needs, and behavioral information.
- ☐ Gather all important documents related to your pets (vaccination records, medical history, microchip information, veterinary contacts), and give copies to your caretaker.
- ☐ Decide what you want to do with your pets if you are detained or deported (keep with family/friends, rehome, or take with you).
- ☐ Prepare an emergency contact list and emergency care plan for your pets.
- ☐ Make sure your pets' vaccinations are up to date.
- ☐ Consider discussing spaying or neutering your pets with your veterinarian.
- ☐ Prepare a power of attorney or written authorization for your caretaker to make veterinary and other decisions for your pets.
- ☐ Make financial arrangements to ensure your caretaker has access to funds for your pets' care.
- ☐ If you plan to take your pet with you, research the export and import requirements for the United States and for your destination country and begin the documentation process as early as possible.
- ☐ If you plan to rehome your pet, contact local shelters, rescue organizations, or potential adopters as early as possible.
- ☐ Give your caretaker a key to your home so they can access your pet quickly in an emergency.

What to bring/send with your pet

- ☐ Pet carrier (airline approved, if applicable)
- ☐ Food (wet and dry food, as applicable)
- ☐ Water (including during travel time)
- ☐ Food and water bowls
- ☐ Leash/collar/harness
- ☐ Medications (including travel medications, if applicable)
- ☐ Veterinary contacts
- ☐ Vaccination and spay or neutering records
- ☐ Microchip/pet license/off-leash licenses information/records
- ☐ Caretaker information/contacts
- ☐ Owner information/contact
- ☐ Written care instructions (medical needs, dietary requirements, behavioral information)
- ☐ Power of attorney
- ☐ Authorization for veterinary treatment and medical decisions
- ☐ Temporary/permanent ownership transfer
- ☐ Financial arrangements/funds for ongoing care
- ☐ Export certificates and health documentation
- ☐ Destination country import documents
- ☐ Airline travel information/tickets