

Companion Animal Spay/Neuter Assistance Bill

Senate Bill 5329/House Bill 1406

www.savewashingtonpets.org

We need spay/neuter legislation to save animals' lives. The purpose of the bill is to provide funding to assist low-income owners of cats and dogs to obtain affordable spay/neuter surgeries, and to provide for spay/neuter surgeries on feral and free-roaming cats. The bill does not make spay/neuter surgery mandatory. *We need your help to get this bill passed in the 2009 legislative session.*

The Problem

- **Euthanasia is not the acceptable solution to pet overpopulation.** Homelessness is the single leading cause of death for healthy cats and dogs in the United States. In Washington State, **over 60,000 cats and dogs** were reported euthanized in Washington shelters in 2005.
- An estimated **45 to 48 percent** of the animals brought to Washington shelters have been euthanized in recent years.
- **Risk of Dog Bites.** *Unaltered dogs* account for 82 percent of serious dog bites; 92 percent of dogs involved in fatal attacks were not altered.
- **Financial Cost.** *Millions of dollars* are spent in Washington each year to impound, care for and euthanize unwanted dogs and cats.

The Solution

- **Spay/Neuter.** The most effective and humane way to reduce the number of animals dying in shelters is a targeted, statewide spay/neuter program. We need to spend money on preventing the problem rather than dealing with the aftermath of unwanted dogs and cats.

Benefits of Legislation

- **Reduce the killing of homeless cats and dogs** through an effective, targeted statewide spay/neuter surgery network.
- **Save money by being proactive.** Controlling the cat and dog population will save taxpayers' dollars by reducing the number of animals handled by local animal care and control agencies. One Washington shelter reported the average cost to handle an animal is \$93. Stray animal pickup and delivery to the shelter costs an additional \$150 to \$200. **For every animal that is not handled by animal control or shelters, the savings can be significant.**
- **Make our communities safer.** Approximately 4.7 million people or nearly two percent of the US population are bitten by dogs each year. In 2007, the Insurance Information Institute reported that dog bites accounted for \$356 million in homeowners' liability claims. By focusing attention on spay/neuter to address the problems of dangerous dogs, **we can expect a reduced number of dog bites and injuries, less pain and suffering, lost time, legal costs, and liability.**

Success of Similar Programs

- At least eight other states have established targeted spay/neuter programs for pets of low-income residents. A New Hampshire state program started in 1994 resulted in a 75-percent decrease in euthanasia and a 34-percent decrease in shelter admissions during its first few years--and reported significant savings from reduced animal impoundment costs due to its program. **These states have shown that there is a better way to address the pet overpopulation crisis.**

This bill is endorsed by the Washington State Federation of Animal Care and Control Agencies, the Humane Society of the United States, and over 40 local humane societies, animal rescue groups, and other animal welfare organizations around the state.

Questions about the Companion Animal Spay/Neuter Assistance Bill

Why should we care about this bill?

About 39 percent of households own dogs and about 34 percent of households own cats. Pet owners are interested in targeted spay/neuter programs to help reduce the killing of homeless pets, reduce animal control costs and make our communities safer. The public wants to see a more effective and humane solution to this crisis-- specifically, a solution that focuses on addressing the problem at the source.

How is this program funded?

The program would be funded by a fee on pet food distributed in Washington State. It is not a retail sales tax and requires no general funds. The cost impact would be less than \$0.03 per pound.

Why is this legislation being proposed now, given the current economic conditions?

Tens of thousands of healthy or treatable cats and dogs are killed in our shelters each year, year after year. The problem gets worse as owners relinquish or abandon their pets due to lost jobs or personal financial hardship. If we do not change the status quo, millions of dollars will continue to be spent each year to deal with the overpopulation crisis, and we will not be gaining the added benefit of helping to reduce the risks of dog-bite injuries.

What are the other benefits besides saving dogs and cats?

This is a **safety issue**. Unaltered dogs are 2.6 times as likely to bite. Surgical sterilization is an important tool to help reduce dog bite injuries that can have serious or fatal consequences.

This is also a **financial issue**. Millions of dollars are spent impounding and euthanizing homeless dogs and cats. Addressing the problem at the source with an aggressive spay/neuter program will reduce the numbers of dogs and cats handled by the animal control system and save taxpayers money.

Why does this program target low-income families and the feral cat population?

Low-income residents are the least likely to be able to afford the costs of spaying and neutering their pets. Studies have shown that "cost" is a major reason why people do not get their pets spayed or neutered. Studies have also shown that pets in low-income households are less likely to be sterilized, thereby making up a significant part of the overpopulation crisis.

We estimate that there are up to 1.2 million feral and free-roaming (stray) cats in Washington. A recent study estimated that only about two percent of free-roaming cats nationwide are altered, and not surprisingly, **the vast majority of kittens born each year come from free-roaming cats**. Spaying and neutering these cats will result in fewer kittens born, less competition for homes, and lives saved through prevention.

How are the spay/neuter surgeries accomplished?

There will be a statewide network of private veterinary clinics, animal care and control agencies, and nonprofit organizations that perform spay/neuter surgeries.

Aren't there already plenty of low cost spay/neuter resources currently being offered by shelters and other non-profits?

Non-profit organizations currently providing low cost spay/neuter surgeries are often overwhelmed with clients and find it difficult or impossible to respond to demand. Donated money is usually in short supply. In addition, residents in some areas of the state simply do not have access to convenient and affordable spay/neuter services.

Will spay/neuter become mandatory under this bill?

No. The purpose of the bill is to provide financial incentives and ready access to spay/neuter surgery through a network of providers. **The bill does not require pet owners to spay or neuter their cats or dogs.**

For additional information please contact:

Andrea Logan
andrea@pawsitivealliance.org

Rick Hall
rahinc@harboret.com

Website:
www.savewashingtonpets.org