

# ***Please Support the Companion Animal Spay/Neuter Assistance Bill in the Washington Legislature: Senate Bill 5329/House Bill 1406***

## ***What You Can Do to Help—with Just a Few Minutes of Your Time:***

Go to [www.savewashingtonpets.org](http://www.savewashingtonpets.org) to learn about the bill, sign up for the newsletter, and join the bill's supporters. **We need your help to get this bill passed in the 2010 legislative session.** Need more information? Contact coordinators Andrea Logan and Rick Hall at [andrea@pawsitivealliance.org](mailto:andrea@pawsitivealliance.org) and [rick@savewashingtonpets.org](mailto:rick@savewashingtonpets.org).

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### ***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—and only a third of the survey recipients responded. On average, we estimate that over 165 dogs and cats lose their lives in shelters each day.
- 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* have been reported to be **seven to ten times** more likely to cause bite injuries to people than altered dogs.
- **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 the Spay/Neuter Assistance Bill***

- **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—most likely the savings will be greater than the costs of implementing the spay/neuter assistance bill.
- **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.**

## **Key Elements of the Spay/Neuter Assistance Bill**

- 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.**
- **The bill would fund at least 70,000 additional spay/neuter surgeries on cats and dogs per year** and vaccinations. This is a reasonable goal, considering the hundreds of thousands of owned, unaltered cats and dogs in Washington, and the estimated unaltered feral cat population that exceeds one million.
- **The spay/neuter assistance bill makes spay/neuter surgery accessible and affordable** for owners of cats and dogs who are low income. The maximum copayment for a cat spay/neuter surgery would be \$10, while the maximum copayment for a dog spay/neuter surgery would be \$20. There would be no copayment required for spay/neuter surgery of feral and free-roaming cats.
- **“Cost” is a significant reason why people don’t alter their cats and dogs.** By breaking down the cost barrier, the bill will help reduce the number of unplanned litters of kitten and puppies, reduce the impacts on local animal care and control agencies, and help prevent tens of thousands of shelter deaths of cats and dogs.
- **Funding could be authorized to help spay/neuter cats and dogs in the possession of shelters and rescue organizations.** This could be particularly important in crisis situations: If the bill were in effect now, it could very well help pay the costs of spay/neuter surgery for the hundreds of dogs recently rescued from puppy mills in Skagit and Snohomish Counties.

## **The Funding Source: A Pet Food Fee**

- A fee on pet food distributed in Washington State would fund the program. It was developed as a fee, rather than a tax, with assistance from House finance staff.
- **The cost impact would be less than \$0.03 per pound**, and would be paid by 250 to 300 companies that distribute pet food in Washington State. The fee is reasonable, appropriate, and administratively feasible. Whether they’re low income or not, pet owners care for animals, want this program, and accept the fee that will support it.
- **There is no other option for solving this problem effectively. Local animal care agencies, shelters, volunteers, and rescue groups do not have the resources to address the crisis.** 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. It is impractical and infeasible to ask for general funds, retail taxes, or other funding sources to address this problem.

***SB 5329/HB 1406 is endorsed by the Washington State Federation of Animal Care and Control Agencies; the Humane Society of the United States; the ASPCA; over 60 local humane societies, animal rescue groups, and other animal welfare organizations; and hundreds of individuals throughout Washington who care for companion animals.***

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