

Companion Animal Spay/Neuter Assistance Legislation for Washington SB 5151/HB 1226

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, **tens of thousands of cats and dogs are reported euthanized in Washington shelters each year, year after year.**
- **Risk of Dog Bite Injuries.** *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 effort. We need to spend money on preventing the problem rather than dealing with the aftermath of unwanted dogs and cats.
- **Your Constituents Want a Proactive, Humane Solution.** About 39 percent of households own dogs and about 34 percent of households own cats. Pet owners are interested in targeted spay/neuter services 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.

Benefits of the Spay/Neuter Assistance Bill

Reduce the killing of homeless cats and dogs through an effective, targeted statewide spay/neuter surgery network.

Supports small businesses (private veterinary clinics) throughout Washington that would perform spay/neuter surgeries.

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 \$120. Stray animal pickup and delivery to the shelter costs an additional \$85 to \$170. For every animal that is not handled by animal control or shelters, the savings can be significant. In many cases it costs less to alter a dog or cat than it costs to handle that same animal through animal control and at the shelter.

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

ethanasia 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 Bills

- 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 approximately **65,000 additional spay/neuter surgeries** on cats and dogs per year. 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 would make **spay/neuter surgery accessible and affordable** for owners of cats and dogs who are low income or on public assistance. 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.

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 of Representatives finance staff.

The cost impact would be 2.5c per pound, and would be paid by companies that distribute pet food in Washington State. **It is NOT a retail sales tax.** 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.

The fee is equitable and affordable: pet owners, not the general public, would pay for this program.

Spay/neuter assistance through this bill would not require state funds, and would not take funding away from any other program.

Because it piggybacks on an existing fee, the funding source minimizes administrative burdens and cost.

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.

This spay/neuter legislation is endorsed by the Washington State Federation of Animal Care and Control Agencies; the Humane Society of the United States; the ASPCA; the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association; over 75 local humane societies, animal rescue groups, and other animal welfare organizations; individual veterinarians; and thousands of individuals throughout Washington who care for companion animals.

For more information go to www.savewashingtonpets.org or contact us at info@savewashingtonpets.org