

Washington Alliance for Humane Legislation

Save Washington Pets

PO Box 2586, North Bend, Washington 98045

November 2011

Dear Member of the Veterinary Community,

We need YOUR support to help pass companion animal spay/neuter assistance bill in the Washington State Legislature: Senate Bill 5151/House Bill 1226.

Why was this bill introduced?

- Tens of thousands of homeless cats and dogs are euthanized in our state's shelters each year.
- It costs millions of dollars for local governments to handle stray and homeless animals through animal control services and shelters. Preventing the problem through spay/neuter surgery makes sense and saves money in the long run.
- Because intact dogs are much more likely to cause serious bite injuries, increasing the number of dogs that are sterilized can make our communities safer.

How would it work?

This bill would help support the costs of spay/neuter surgeries for companion animals owned by low-income individuals, and support the costs of spay/neuter surgeries for feral and free-roaming cats.

Surgeries would be performed through a network of private, nonprofit, and local agency spay/neuter clinics throughout Washington. Clinics choosing to participate in the program would receive fair and reasonable compensation for services.

What can you do?

Take a few minutes to learn about the bill. We have attached a flyer, a fact sheet just for veterinarians, and a list of the veterinarians who support the companion animal spay/neuter legislation. We have additional information on our website: www.savewashingtonpets.org.

Please let us know that you SUPPORT passage of SB 5151/HB 1226. The proposed spay/neuter assistance bill provides a humane and cost effective solution to the crisis of pet overpopulation.

Contact bill advocate Rick Hall at rick@savewashingtonpets.org or by phone at 253-426-0238. (Contact Rick if you have any questions, too.)

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

The Companion Animal Spay/Neuter Assistance Bill in the Washington State Legislature: SB 5151/HB 1226

A Message to the Veterinary Community in Washington State



The spay/neuter assistance bill, SB 5151/HB 1226, will provide funds to help pay for spay/neuter surgeries on cats and dogs belonging to low-income people; and for spay/neuter surgery on feral and free-roaming cats. The bill would **not** mandate spay/neuter surgery for pets--decisions to alter cats and dogs under the program would be voluntary.

Under the proposed bill, surgeries would be performed by a network of private, public, and nonprofit veterinary clinics throughout Washington. This effort is

needed to help end the tragic consequences of pet overpopulation in our state: Tens of thousands of healthy, adoptable animals are euthanized each year due to space limitations in shelters and lack of available homes.

Like you, the many people who support spay/neuter assistance legislation care deeply about the welfare of companion animals. After learning more about this bill, we would welcome your support. Questions? Visit our website at savewashingtonpets.org or contact advocate coordinator Rick Hall at rick@savewashingtonpets.org or at 253-426-0238.

Key Features of the Spay/Neuter Assistance Program

- **Participation by any veterinarian in the spay/neuter program would be entirely voluntary.** Because it is voluntary, the program will be designed to be attractive to veterinarians. As is the practice in other states, it would minimize administrative burdens. And it would ensure that veterinary spay/neuter surgery providers receive fair and reasonable compensation.
- **Surgeries would be performed on dogs and cats belonging to low-income individuals. Funds would also be used to spay/neuter feral and free-roaming cats.** To the extent funds are available, funds would also help pay for spay/neuter surgeries for dogs and cats in the possession of animal shelters and animal rescue organizations. That's important to help ensure those pets are altered before adoption.
- **The program would be funded by a small fee (2.5c per pound) imposed at the distributor level on cat and dog food.** *It is not a retail sales tax and would not be collected by any veterinary clinic that sells pet food.* The fee supplements an existing pet-food inspection fee already being paid to the Washington State Department of Agriculture by companies that

register pet food for sale in Washington. Many of these companies are familiar names: Hills, Nestle Purina, IAMS, Royal Canin, Menu Foods, Del Monte Pet Products, and others.

- **The program will save tens of thousands of cats' and dogs' lives.** We know spay/neuter programs are effective and the most humane solution to the companion animal overpopulation crisis.
- **An effective, statewide spay/neuter program will pay off financially over the long run.** It costs more in animal control and sheltering costs to handle unwanted animals than it does to perform spay/neuter surgeries.
- **Dogs that are intact are much more likely to cause serious bite injuries to people which can result in liability and insurance claims.** Providing affordable, accessible spay/neuter surgery for dogs belonging to low-income individuals will help reduce the risk of serious dog bite injuries and accompanying claims.

If you run a private veterinary clinic and wish to participate to help low-income pet owners obtain spay/neuter surgeries for their pets, here's how it would work. The process is designed to be simple, guided by approaches used in other states and many communities.

1. The lead state agency (Dept. of Health or DSHS) would encourage private veterinary clinics to enroll as spay/neuter surgery providers, and ask them to provide their list of fees for performing spay/neuter surgeries.
2. The lead agency would review fees and establish agreements with veterinary clinics for performing spay/neuter surgeries. Fees that are usual, customary and reasonable would be allowed as defined by the spay/neuter bill. It is expected that rates of reimbursement would be established for categories of spay/neuter surgeries, such a feline neuter, feline spay, canine neuter (various weight ranges), canine spay (various weight ranges); for special circumstances such as cryptorchid males, pregnant or in-heat females; and for related services, such as presurgical exams and vaccinations.
3. Pet owners interested in having their pets spayed or neutered under this program would go through a simple application process. Private veterinary clinics are not required to screen applicants.
4. Applicants that are approved receive a voucher for spay/neuter surgery for his or her pets. That person may take his or her pets to any participating spay/neuter surgery provider. The pet owner would pay no more than \$10 for each cat spay/neuter surgery and no more than \$20 for each dog spay/neuter surgery--the copayment amounts.
5. The veterinary clinic would send invoices to the lead agency for reimbursement for spay/neuter surgeries performed under the program. Copies of approved spay/neuter surgery vouchers from clients would accompany the invoices.
6. The lead agency would pay the veterinary clinic for its services.

Veterinarians Expressing Support for the Companion Animal Spay/Neuter Assistance Legislation

Listing as of November 28, 2011

Individuals:

Dr. Kathy Haigh
Washington State Legislature
Cosponsor of HB 1226, Spay/Neuter Assistance Bill
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Dr. Holly Birkett
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Dr. Bethany Faulkner
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