

ORD-17 CORRESPONDENCE - Judy Crumpton

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Subject: Letter in Support of Mandatory Spay/Neuter Ordinance
Date: March 9, 2015 3:42:50 PM PDT
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5 Attachments, 159 KB

March 9, 2015

Dear Mayor Garcia and Long Beach City Council Members:

I am the General Manager of the Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter (SCCAS) and I am writing to support the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance you will consider this week.

SCCAS is the only open admission, full service animal shelter in Santa Cruz County. We have two facilities and take in approximately 6,000 animals annually. We also operate two low-cost spay/neuter clinics for public use as part of our Planned Pethood program. Currently, we have a month-long waiting list for subsidized spay/neuter appointments due to the popularity of this program.

The American Kennel Club (AKC) opposes mandatory spay/neuter ordinances in order to protect their vested interest in the buying and selling of animals for profit. My perspective is quite different, and has grown out of my work for the past 15 years in open admission animal shelters (including the City of Chicago Animal Care and Control and Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission) that deal with surplus animals, animals with behavior and medical problems, animals that pose a threat to public safety and animals that are the product of irresponsible pet ownership.

The AKC has made numerous misrepresentations about the Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter in its argument against the proposed spay/neuter ordinance. The AKC states that the SCCAS's euthanasia rates have been "essentially flat" since 1995. As the attached statistics demonstrate, this is inaccurate. Both our animal intake and animal euthanasia rates have steadily decreased since 1994, the year our County's spay/neuter ordinance was enacted.

The AKC also contends that Santa Cruz County's mandatory spay/neuter ordinance has decreased our license compliance. Our current license compliance is 18%, not 13% as the AKC claims. Our licensing compliance has increased since we stepped up our community outreach efforts and started our Planned Pethood program in 2011, and it continues to grow.

The AKC also states that our shelter's operating costs increased due to our mandatory spay/neuter ordinance. This again is information taken out of context. SCCAS has gone through a number of changes since 1995 including separating from the Santa Cruz SPCA (2002) to form a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) and acquiring land and building a new shelter (2008). All this was done to improve animal care and control services in Santa Cruz County and to keep up with a growing population. Additionally, in 2004, the City of Watsonville joined the JPA. Watsonville is an underserved area, with a predominantly Hispanic population. A large percentage of our impounded animals come from the City of Watsonville.

In the past 40 years the number of animals euthanized in shelters has steadily decreased, mostly as the result of increased public awareness of pet overpopulation and increased access to spay/neuter. All reputable animal shelters and rescue groups spay/neuter animals prior to adoption. It is considered a best practice. In addition to preventing additional unwanted animals, sterilization improves a pet's health and temperament.

Santa Cruz County's animal intake and euthanasia rates have decreased since our mandatory spay/neuter ordinance took effect in 1994, even with other variables such as adding an underserved area in 2004, the economic recession starting in 2008 and general population growth. Mandatory spay/neuter is an invaluable tool when animals end up at the shelter and when animals are causing problems in the field.

The ordinance is enforced like other animal ordinances; mainly through complaints. We do not go banging on people's doors checking pet's spay/neuter status. The ordinance simply provides yet another resource to use to target irresponsible pet owners and an incentive for pet owners to do the right thing.

We do not believe that removing an animal from an owner is an effective response to a failure to spay/neuter because an owner whose animal is removed usually will simply acquire another animal which they will also not spay/neuter, and the cycle continues. Instead, the SCCAS waives or reduces fees for pet owners who cannot afford to reclaim their animals or get them spay/neutered. We raise funds specifically for this purpose and have secured grants to help with this as well. We always try to return the animal to the owner if it is in the animal's best interest, which most of the time it is. We also issue "fix-it" citations that drop all fees if the owner has their animal spay/neutered within 30 days.

U.S. taxpayers spend millions of dollars each year to rescue, house and euthanize homeless animals. Spay/neuter is the most humane and fiscally responsible way to address pet overpopulation. Mandatory spay/neuter is a common good law. Rabies has been eliminated in this country due to mandatory vaccine, license and restraint laws, just as polio and small pox have been eradicated thanks to public good vaccination laws. Many lives are saved each year in automobile crashes due to mandatory seat belt and child safety seat laws. Similarly, society benefits from spay/neuter by both reducing the number of unwanted animals and also promoting healthier, behaviorally sound animals in communities.

Common good laws coupled with public education ultimately create cultural shifts and social movements that generate long-term change. We must continue the cultural shift until spay/neuter is commonly accepted as an integral part of responsible pet ownership. Changing people's behavior is the key to solving pet overpopulation.

Thank you for the opportunity to address mandatory spay/neuter. If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me anytime.

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