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Subje Proposed Cat Licensing Program: From Teresa
ct Chagrin, PETA

October 15, 2009

The Honorable Suja Lowenthal
Long Beach City Council, District 2
Civic Center Plaza
333 West Ocean Blvd., 14th Floor
Long Beach, California 90802

2 pages via fax and e-mail: 562-570-6882; district2@longbeach.gov

Dear Councilwoman Lowenthal:

We hope this finds you well. I am writing on behalf of PETA and our more than 2 million members and supporters to thank you for your work to reduce the number lost and unwanted cats in Long Beach and increase the number of cats redeemed by their guardians from the Long Beach Animal Care Services Shelter. We are thankful that animals in Long Beach have you on their side, and hope that you will consider us a resource if we can help with your efforts.

Cat registration programs protect cats and the communities in which they are established. According to The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), "[a] government-mandated cat registration program (historically called "licensing") serves as the foundation for any cat control program. ... Statistics show that mandatory registration programs increase the numbers of impounded cats returned to their owners." In *Animal Control Management: A Guide for Local Governments*, the International City County Management Association (ICMA) reports that, "[m]andatory registration ensures that pet owners shoulder some of the financial responsibility for the costs associated with animal care and control programs. Higher pet registration fees, coupled with promotional strategies and stricter enforcement, almost always result in greater revenues. With the cost of administering animal control programs on the rise, many local agencies are finding new, more creative means for promoting mandatory registration and increasing revenues."

ICMA goes on to report that, "[d]espite a popular misconception, cats are not independent, self-sufficient creatures. They are part of a world that people have domesticated and, as a result, people need to assume responsibility for their welfare. A

cat properly cared for can live from 15 to 20 years, but HSUS estimates that the average life span of a free-roamer is less than 3 years. Mandatory cat registration helps communities solve numerous problems. It can help protect lost cats from being unnecessarily euthanized. In communities that register cats, every lost cat that is registered by a responsible owner can be returned home. Making vaccination a prerequisite for a tag can help prevent the spread of rabies. Cat registration and identification are essential before communities can enforce laws that require all cats allowed outdoors to be supervised or to be spayed or neutered.”

I am attaching a portion of the ICMA booklet for your use. You can purchase the entire booklet through ICMA, [here](#) (e-mailed copy).

PETA strongly supports efforts to require that all owned cats be registered. Please let me know if there is any way that we can help you. I can be reached at 443-320-1277 or via email at TeresaC@peta.org. Thank you for your hard work for animals and the citizens of Long Beach.

Most sincerely,



Teresa Lynn Chagrin, Animal Care & Control Specialist
Cruelty Investigations Department

cc: Broc Coward, Chief of Staff
John Keisler, Bureau Manager
Judith Crumpton



More than half of 20 pit bull-related fatalities (most dogs used for fighting are pit bulls) investigated in detail by HSUS in recent years involved male owners associated with dogfighting or other criminal activity, and 55 percent of the dogs showed scarring or other evidence of abuse. None of the dogs had been licensed or neutered and only 10 percent had been vaccinated. Children are especially at risk around dogs bred and trained to fight. Bloodlines of dogs bred specifically for fighting may make their way into the genetic makeup of companion animal populations, increasing the chance of human injury or fatality.

Dogfighting leads to other problems as well. Owners frequently train their dogs for fights using smaller animals such as cats, rabbits, or small dogs. These bait animals are often unwanted litters, stolen pets, or animals obtained through free-to-good-home advertisements.

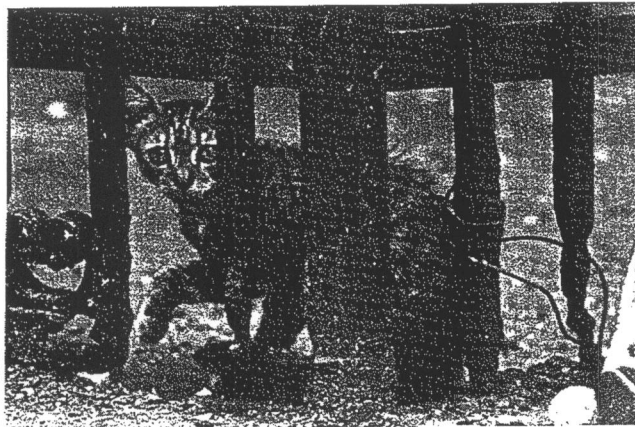
The investigation of illegal animal fighting activities by local law enforcement, animal control, and humane agencies is frequently difficult, in part because participants are often scattered over a wide area that includes multiple jurisdictions. Successful investigations tend to be those that are tightly coordinated among several law enforcement agencies.¹⁰

Free-Roaming Cats

Cats passed dogs as America's most popular pet (in terms of sheer numbers) sometime during the mid-1980s, a trend fueled by social forces such as the rise of the two-worker family and increasing urbanization. Even before then, many animal care and control agencies had found themselves dealing with increasing problems related to free-roaming cats—owned cats allowed to go outside as well as stray and feral cats.

Today, because of the eastern raccoon rabies epizootic (cats are now the most common domestic rabies vector), the rise of organized programs designed to manage feral-cat colonies,¹¹ and even evolving societal attitudes that place a greater value on the humane treatment of cats, solving cat-related issues is an important focus of communities. Cat-control laws remain more rare than standard, but all these trends may make them more common in the future. The demographics of the cat problems vary substantially among different regions of the country, and communities are tailoring solutions to address their specific problems.

In many communities, a cat registration or licensing program serves as the foundation. Some jurisdictions, such as Montgomery County, Maryland, and Santa Rosa, California,



Cats are now America's most popular pet, but feral cats—a growing problem in urban areas—spread disease and contribute to animal overpopulation.

also require that all unrestrained cats be spayed or neutered. The island of Oahu, Hawaii, in 1995 passed a cat protection law that requires all cats over six months of age to wear identification, and if the cats are allowed to roam they must be sterilized. Acceptable methods of identification include a collar and tag or microchip. Owners of unsterilized cats trapped by the public and brought to the shelter must pay a \$100 fine to reclaim the animal; the fine is waived if the animal is sterilized within 30 days. Nearly 100 percent of owners who violate the ordinance choose to have their animals spayed or neutered.

Oahu is also among the jurisdictions that have begun overseeing programs designed



to manage and ultimately reduce feral-cat colonies. Since 1993 the Hawaiian Humane Society has been providing free spays and neuters to feral cats if their caretakers participate in a trap, neuter, release, and manage (TNRM) program.¹² Registered feral-cat caregivers can purchase collars and tags for \$2 or microchips for \$5, and can bring cats to the humane society's clinic for free sterilizations. The organization has sterilized more than 15,000 feral cats since 1993.

In 1999, Rhode Island became the first state to require cat owners to outfit their cats with some form of identification. Options include a collar and tag, an ear tag, a rabies tag, or an embroidered collar. People caring for feral cats must identify the animals with a tipped or notched ear, in conjunction with a microchip or another form of identification. Increasing numbers of localities are requiring that all cats be safely confined and not allowed to roam.

Animal Rabies

Rabies is the most deadly disease that animals can transmit to humans. Transmitted through bite wounds, breaks in the skin (such as scratches or cuts), and mucous membranes, rabies is almost always fatal in humans once symptoms appear.

According to public health experts, animal control programs in the United States continue to play a crucial role in controlling rabies. "Local governments should initiate and maintain effective programs to ensure vaccination of all dogs, cats, and ferrets and to remove strays and unwanted animals," says the 2001 *Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control*, a set of recommendations published by the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians that is widely considered to be the authoritative source on

Elements of an Effective Community Cat Care and Control Program

- Mandatory registration (licensing) of cats; if a fee is charged, it should be higher for unsterilized cats than for sterilized cats (a concept termed differential licensing)
- Mandatory identification of cats; in addition to requiring that cats wear collars and tags, communities should consider implementing a backup permanent identification system such as a microchip program
- Mandatory rabies vaccinations for all cats older than three months of age, which is the age recommended by vaccine manufacturers
- Mandatory sterilization of all cats adopted from public and private animal shelters and rescue groups
- Mandatory sterilization of all free-roaming cats
- A mandatory minimum shelter holding period for stray cats consistent with that established for stray dogs, preferably five days, including a Saturday; this policy should allow for euthanasia of suffering animals before completion of the holding period
- Adequate and appropriate shelter holding space, staffing, and other resources necessary to humanely hold stray felines for the mandatory minimum holding period
- An ongoing public education program that promotes responsible cat care
- Subsidized sterilization programs to encourage cat owners to sterilize their cats



rabies control. "Such procedures in the United States have reduced laboratory-confirmed cases of rabies in dogs from 6,949 in 1947 to 111 in 1999."¹³

Such programs have been successful in protecting humans as well. Since 1980, fewer than 40 rabies cases in humans have been reported nationwide; most had strains of the virus usually found in bats. Yet, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), every year between 16,000 and 39,000 people must undergo rabies postexposure treatment after coming into contact with rabid animals or those whose vaccination status is uncertain.¹⁴

Today, the main carrier of rabies into the human community is not the dog but the cat (with 278 cases reported in 1999). Cats allowed to roam free, particularly at night, are likely to come into contact with other nocturnal roamers such as skunks and raccoons—the primary vector species of rabies in the wild. Accordingly, increasing numbers of local governments have been backing measures—including cat licensing—to inoculate cats against rabies. As of January 2001, 25 states mandated rabies vaccination of cats, 13 required local jurisdictions to vaccinate cats against rabies, and 12 had no laws requiring rabies vaccination of cats.¹⁵

A trend since 1977 has been the epizootic of raccoon rabies that has spread across the northeastern United States. By 1999, according to the CDC, the epizootic had crossed the Appalachian mountain range and had begun to spread to the Midwest. The epizootic front advances about 18 to 24 miles each year.¹⁶

Captive Wildlife and Exotic Pets

Wild and exotic pets—from iguanas to tigers—offer a different kind of challenge to a community animal care and control program. These animals have complex nutritional and housing needs that cannot be met with traditional pet food, a litter box, and a warm basket in which to sleep. A Vietnamese pot-bellied pig, manageable when young, quickly grows to be too large; a baby monkey, adorable at first, soon becomes too destructive. A bear or tiger cub, playful and endearing when young, grows up to threaten the entire community. Eventually the appeal of owning exotic animals disappears, and owners want to get rid of them. Considering the number of conventional pets—dogs and cats—deposited in animal shelters by owners who could not cope with the responsibility of caring for them, it is not surprising that shelters also frequently receive wild or exotic animals.

Two recent trends are having a negative impact on communities and are requiring additional attention by local animal care and control agencies. First, the number of U.S. households owning reptiles increased by more than 40 percent between 1994 and 2000, with more than 4 million households owning reptiles in 2000. The decision in the mid-1990s by pet superstores PETSMART and Petco to sell small mammals and reptiles in their stores has likely contributed to this increase; shelters in communities where these stores are located have reported increases in the numbers of small mammals and reptiles relinquished by pet owners. The Washington Humane Society in the District of Columbia is typical of many shelters: In 1999 the organization took in 101 reptiles including 29 iguanas, 15 boa constrictors, and 13 pythons.

Communities pay for the trend toward owning reptiles in another way as well: CDC announced in November 1999 that reptile-related salmonellosis is a substantial threat to human health. More than 93,000 cases of reptile-related salmonellosis occur each year, including severe cases (particularly in children) that have resulted in hospitalization and death.

The second trend has been a recent surge in the popularity of large wild cats as pets. Only California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, and Tennessee have implemented



statewide bans on the ownership of lions, tigers, leopards, cougars, and similar wild felines. Several other states regulate the ownership of wild cats, usually by requiring a permit. Some local jurisdictions ban their ownership, but these animals are still legal in many areas. Eleven large cats ended up at one Texas shelter in 1999.

In 2000 the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which does not have the authority to regulate the ownership of large exotic cats as pets, nonetheless issued a statement discouraging the ownership of wild felines by amateurs. "[Our] personnel have seen too many instances where wild and exotic cats kept by untrained people have not only harmed people but suffered themselves due to poor care," said the USDA.¹⁷ In 1999, in-depth investigations of the animal trade by the San Jose *Mercury News* and the Center for Public Integrity detailed several misfortunes caused by exotic cats kept as pets—from a Siberian tiger running loose and scaring residents in Portland, Oregon, to a pet lion and tiger that mauled their owner's grandchild in Caldwell, Texas. Incidents such as these sometimes prompt swift action by local lawmakers to ban ownership of wild cats—but the action often comes too late for the victims.

Wolf-dog hybrids continue to pose a threat to public health. CDC has found that pet wolf-dog hybrids have killed at least 14 people since 1979 and maimed numerous others. Hybrids living in close proximity to people sometimes fail to distinguish between people and prey, and they respond to children as they might respond to small animals. The combination of domestic canine and wild wolf makes these animals unpredictably aggressive and potentially dangerous. No rabies vaccine is licensed for hybrid animals, which compounds the problem. "Wild animals or hybrids should not be kept as pets," says the 2001 *Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control*.¹⁸ Eleven states and some cities and counties have banned ownership of these animals within their limits.

Legislation passed in some communities broadly defines captive wildlife as any species that does not fall into the several categories of animals typically found on a farm or in the average pet-owning home. By defining what a wild animal is not, the universe of known species is left open for legislation and enforcement—a good idea because predicting what pet fads might develop is difficult.

In addition to wild and exotic animals kept as pets, local governments must take note of traveling animal acts such as circuses. Commonly engaged by civic or commercial organizations ill-equipped to judge their safety or standards of animal care, these acts can pose a threat to public safety and should be prohibited or stringently regulated.

The Animal Cruelty-Human Violence Connection

Many studies have documented the link between cruelty to animals and other social ills such as domestic violence. A 1997 study by the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and Northeastern University found that 70 percent of animal abusers had committed at least one other criminal offense and almost 40 percent had committed violent crimes against people.¹⁹ A 1997 survey of 50 of the largest shelters for battered women in 49 states and the District of Columbia found that 85.4 percent of women and 64 percent of children entering the shelters talked about incidents of pet abuse in the family.²⁰

The link between cruelty to animals and violence against humans has garnered the attention of law enforcement and social services nationwide and led to partnerships among government agencies, including animal care and control agencies. Many interagency programs incorporate cross-reporting, cross-training, and other tactics designed to help officers and court officials identify perpetrators.²¹ Such programs are proving to be another benefit of progressive, well-funded animal care and control programs.

Duties assigned to the animal control commission usually include:

- Recommending rules and regulations for the care and control of animals and facilities covered by the ordinance
- Reviewing budgets and contracts for all animal control work
- Conducting public hearings when necessary to determine whether any individual or establishment is in violation of the ordinance
- Hearing appeals of persons whose permits or licenses have been revoked by the licensing authority
- Hearing complaints against the professional conduct of animal care and control personnel or the local government itself
- Mediating disputes between the local government and a contracting humane organization over reimbursement for animal control services or other issues.

In some municipalities, the animal control commission is distinct from another entity often called an animal matters hearing board. That board, not the animal control commission, is responsible for hearings and appeals related to dangerous dogs, permit revocations, and other matters.

Mandatory Registration

A mandatory registration program for both dogs and cats is the foundation of any animal control ordinance. Commonly called licensing, a government-mandated dog and cat registration system provides pet registration (license) tags to pet owners in exchange for a small fee. These programs are most successful in communities that spread the message that licensing is a pet protection service rather than a burdensome tax; in fact, using the term "mandatory registration" instead of "licensing" underscores such programs' role in reuniting lost pets with their owners. Mandatory registration serves six functions:

Lost-Pet Recovery Service

Mandatory registration helps increase the numbers of lost pets returned to their owners. Effective mandatory registration systems always include a requirement that dogs and cats be outfitted with collars and government-provided identification tags at all times. (A few jurisdictions also accept microchips as a valid form of identification.)

Stray animals with valid identification tags picked up by animal control officers can be returned to their owners without being impounded although a warning or citation may still be issued because the animal was running at large. This approach often enables field officers to educate pet owners in person about proper restraint and other responsible pet issues, and it saves on impoundment costs.

Statistics show a compelling correlation between mandatory registration and return-to-owner rates. HSUS estimates that jurisdictions that mandate dog registration but not cat registration successfully return 15 percent to 30 percent of dogs to their owners versus just 2 percent to 5 percent of cats. After the island of Oahu, Hawaii, instituted a cat registration system as part of its comprehensive cat protection law, the number of cats returned to owners rose from 138 (0.9 percent of impounded cats) in fiscal year 1995 to 549 (3.6 percent) in fiscal year 2000.