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Connecticut HB 5795

An Act Concerning the Spaying, Neutering and Vaccination of Dogs and Cats

-Fact Sheet-

Why does Connecticut need to enact HB 5795, which will establish a targeted low income companion animal and free roaming cat spay/neuter program?

- ☛ **To save lives by significantly reducing the free-roaming cat population, unwanted animal births in general, and shelter intake and euthanasia rates.** In 2003-04, 10,582 dogs and cats were impounded in Connecticut by animal control and not redeemed; 7,442 were “sold” as pets; 910 were D.O.A.; and 2,347 (or 6.43 per day) were put to death. Notably, the New Hampshire targeted low-income sterilization program, established in 1993, resulted in a 34% decrease in shelter intakes and 75% decrease in euthanasia between 1994 and 2000.

Moreover, it is estimated that in Connecticut, there are anywhere from half a million to 675,000 free-roaming cats due to an array of factors¹:

- *owned cats (as opposed to owned dogs) are more likely to remain unsterilized due to the procedure's cost, and unsterilized cats are more likely than sterilized cats to be relinquished or abandoned by their owner;*
- *approximately 98% of free-roaming cats are unsterilized – a problem compounded by the fact that female, unsterilized cats can remain pregnant year-round;*
- *Connecticut law requires only that animal control pick up stray dogs, not cats.*

Private rescues try to address the free-roaming cat overpopulation problem by assisting low income persons unable to sterilize their animals, and by engaging in and facilitating trap, neuter, and return (TNR), but they are simply overwhelmed by the sheer number of free-roaming cats, which far exceeds their ability to help.

¹ Frank Hamilton, PhD, “Are We Prepared to Pay the Price,” *Feral Cat Activist*, Jan. 2006 (citing Levy, J., Woods, J., Turick, S., & Etheridge, D. for estimate that 12% of total households feed an average of 3.6 free-roaming cats, and *The Capital Times*, Madison Wis. April 12, 2005 for estimate that there are 100 free-roaming cats per square mile); Julie Levy, DVM, “Feral Cat Management,” Chap. 23, p. 378, in *Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff* (Blackwell Publishers, 2004) (estimates that there are 0.5 free-roaming cats per household).

- ☛ **To dramatically reduce impoundment costs.** Notably, not only have New Hampshire intake and euthanasia rates decreased, but also every dollar spent on the New Hampshire low-income program has saved \$3.15 in impoundment fees.
- ☛ **To protect public health and safety.** Sterilization reduces the incidence of common canine and feline behavioral problems such as aggression, roaming, and spraying. The program's pre-surgical immunization component – which ensures that participating dogs and cats are vaccinated – would deter the spread of rabies.

How much will the proposed targeted spay/neuter program cost?

- ☛ **Approximately \$982,000 with two full-time administrators.** Appropriate models – and ones used to calculate the approximate cost of such programs in other states that have recently implemented similar sterilization programs (e.g., Maine, Illinois) – are Maddie's Alabama targeted low-income companion animal sterilization program and Maddie's California feral cat sterilization program. This Connecticut estimate is based on Maddie's per capita costs adjusted for such things as the lower Connecticut poverty rate; higher cost of living and administrative costs; and the inclusion of pre-surgical immunizations.

How will it be funded?

- ☛ **HB 5795 is self-funding and would finance the proposed targeted low-income companion animal and free-roaming cat spay/neuter program in the following ways:** .

- **Adoption fee increase.** According to the most recent figures published by the Department of Agriculture's Animal Population Control Program (APCP)² – which celebrated its fourth full year of solvency in January 2006 – a total of 5,163 dogs and cats were sold by Connecticut pounds in 2005. By raising the basic adoption fee by \$20 (i.e., from \$5 to \$25, for a total adoption fee increase from \$50 to \$70), **HB 5795** would provide between **\$59,970** and **\$77,445** in revenue in 2007 for the proposed spay/neuter program, depending on whether pound "sales" hold steady or, as in 2004-05, they decline by 12 % in 2005-06 and again in 2006-07. (*Sections 7, 8*)
- **Redemption fee increase.** In 2003-04, 8,587 animals were redeemed by their owners at the pound for a discretionary fee of \$15 per animal. **HB 5795** would increase the redemption fee, mandating a \$25 fee for dogs and unsterilized cats. Of this fee, \$20 would go toward the proposed spay/neuter program, annually netting **\$171,740** (based on 2003-04 figures). (*Sections 8, 9*)
- **Voluntary income tax check-off.** A voluntary income tax check-off would generate approximately **\$121,000** for the spay/neuter program. Several states, including Maine, Colorado, Illinois, Oklahoma, and Virginia, have already given their residents this option, and other states, including New York, are contemplating it. Moreover, under **HB 5795**, it would be purely optional, not a mandate. (*Section 6*)
- **Dog licensing enforcement.** Despite an approximate 754,413 owned dogs in Connecticut, the number of issued licenses has averaged 211,750 per year for the last ten years. Licensing the other 543,263 dogs would generate an additional \$1,151,717 to \$1,629,789 for the spay/neuter program (depending on whether an average of \$2.12 or \$3 is received per license). In fact, **just doubling to 423,500 the number of licenses issued** would generate an **additional \$450,687 to \$635,250** for the proposed spay/neuter program. **HB 5795** would make increased dog licensing enforcement possible – as it was in New Hampshire in 1994 – by requiring veterinarians to provide copies of all issued rabies

² March 6, 2006 Animal Population Control Program press release.

certificates to their respective town clerks. In addition, **HB 5795** would dedicate **\$15 of any fines paid for failure to license** to the proposed spay/neuter program. (*Section 11, 12, 15*)

- ***APCP funds no longer needed to sterilize pound animals.*** APCP data reflects a 15% decrease in the funds required to sterilize pound animals between 2004, when \$405,350 was used, and 2005, when \$344,547 was used.³ If pound “sales” continue to decrease, notwithstanding stable or, in the event of **HB 5795**’s enactment, increased APCP revenue, **\$156,595** less will be needed to sterilize pound animals in 2007 than in 2004 and could be dedicated to the proposed spay/neuter program.

- ***Other public health and safety fee increases.*** Just as reducing the number of unowned cats and dogs is good for public welfare, so is discouraging such practices as chaining or tethering dogs and allowing dogs to roam at large. For example, a chained or tethered dog is 2.8 times more likely to bite than one who is not chained or tethered. Channeling a portion of the fines for these unsafe practices into a population control program that will protect public health and safety is sound social and fiscal policy. Thus, **HB 5795** would dedicate **one-quarter of any \$250-\$500 fine** assessed for unreasonable chaining or tethering to the proposed spay/neuter program. **HB 5795** would also assess **not less than a \$40 fine** for allowing one’s dog to roam at large and dedicate **one-quarter of the fine** to the proposed spay/neuter program. (*Sections 16, 17*)

³ *Id.*; 2004 APCP Annual Report.