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## A small tax could save many dogs and cats

### FREE OR LOW-COST SPAYING AND NEUTERING CLINICS CAN LIMIT EUTHANASIA

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Here's a heartbreaking statistic: More than 1,500 dogs and cats are euthanized in California every day.

*Every day.*

That adds up to about 500,000 dogs and cats being put to death a year. You don't have to be a cat or dog lover to find the numbers appalling. The staggering costs alone - roughly \$250 million a year - are convincing proof that this is a problem in vital need of a solution.

Enter Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, the Van Nuys Democrat who is proposing legislation requiring all dogs and cats in the state to be spayed or neutered unless owners have a special permit. That would solve the problem. But dogs will start meowing before a sufficient number of legislators line up to pass the bill.

California needs an alternative proposal that will address the issue and also alleviate concerns - primarily from Republicans - about infringing on pet owners' rights. Because every dollar spent on spaying and neutering equates to a \$5 savings in picking up, sheltering and euthanizing dogs and cats, what's needed most is funding for more low-cost or no-cost spaying and neutering clinics throughout the state. That would sharply cut the number of feral cats and stray dogs.

Other states have tried increasing the cost of pet licenses to pay the costs. But that results only in fewer people buying licenses. So, here's a funding idea. How about invoking a small tax per serving on dog and cat food to raise the funds needed to provide a sufficient number of additional low-cost or no-cost spaying and neutering clinics throughout the state?

Santa Clara County and the city of San Jose know the value of investing in neutering and spaying clinics. Together, they invest more than \$300,000 a year to help drive down the high costs of sheltering and euthanizing cats and dogs. That in large part helps explain why the number of euthanasias for dogs and cats in the Bay Area is only 50,000 annually, proportionately much less than the Los Angeles region.

A Santa Clara County study in 1994 found that a single unspayed female cat with all her unspayed female offspring can reasonably be expected to be responsible for more than 3,200 kittens if there is no human intervention.

Humane societies throughout California have struggled to cope with the growing number of stray cats and dogs for decades. The problem has too often resulted in horrific, overcrowded conditions at Central Valley and Southern California shelters.

A dedicated funding source to provide money for no-cost and low-cost spaying and neutering clinics is the only way to break the euthanasia cycle, which would be a godsend for cats and dogs - along with their human friends - throughout California.