

## Opinion: AB 1634 will reduce number of unwanted pets

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I have served as the veterinarian managing licensee for more than seven years at the Oakland animal shelter and have done so for the last two years at the Hayward animal shelter. As a veterinarian, my first priority, and those of my colleagues, is to provide compassionate and high quality care to my patients. As a shelter veterinarian, my priority is to decrease the suffering of animals placed there.

More than 800,000 stray dogs and cats are put into shelters every year in California. To make it worse, we are killing more than 400,000 of these helpless animals simply because no one wants them. This is an average of more than 1,000 dogs and cats every day-one death every 75 seconds.

Puppies and kittens are cute. We all love them. The problem occurs when they grow up and they are no longer adorable or convenient so that people cast them off, either to run wild or be abandoned at shelters.

Along with the shelter veterinarians who spend 100 percent of their time caring for and spaying and neutering animals, I believe the only way we can effectively address the overpopulation of dogs and cats in California is to support the passage of AB 1634.

AB 1634, the California Healthy Pets Act, will require that any owned cat or dog be spayed or neutered, with certain exceptions, such as guide, service or signal dogs, animals used by law enforcement agencies and for purebred animals whose owners have a breeder's license. California-licensed veterinarians can provide temporary waivers to delay spaying or neutering, and they may also support applications to keep animals intact, owing to their age or poor health.

Even though we see thousands of pets adopted from our shelters, only half of the dogs and cats brought to shelters leave there alive. The best solution is to address the number of unwanted animals born each year, so we have enough homes to accommodate the pets that need them.

Beyond the issue of reducing the number of unwanted pets, there are many reasons to spay and neuter dogs and cats. Both males and females will have longer, healthier lives. Female dogs spayed before their first heat cycle are much less likely to develop mammary or breast cancer. This also eliminates the potential of uterine infections. For males, it eliminates testicular cancer and decreases the incidence of prostate disease.

There are behavioral benefits as well. Spayed and neutered dogs and cats are usually calmer and less likely to display aggressive behavior or marking of their territory. They are more responsive to training and are less likely to roam which reduces the number of cats and dogs that suffer serious injury or death as a

result of being hit by cars or becoming disoriented and lost. Altered dogs and cats are also less likely to attack humans and other animals.

Finally, California taxpayers are spending an astounding \$250 million a year to provide care, food, euthanasia and disposal of unwanted dogs and cats. Much of this money could either be saved or used to improve the conditions for the dogs and cats that will still end up in animal shelters until homes are found.

California has tried many other options and incentives to encourage pet owners to have their pets spayed and neutered, options which clearly have not been as effective as we would like them to be. When we are destroying hundreds of thousands of kittens, puppies, dogs and cats every year simply because they were born, it is obvious we need a new approach. I encourage everyone to join me in support of AB 1634, the California Healthy Pets Act.

*Dr. Singer owns Noble Veterinary Clinic in Hayward and cares for small and exotic animals. He holds a seat on the California Veterinary Medical Association Legislative Committee and is the managing licensee for the Oakland Animal Shelter.*

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