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Bob Barker helps pass pet bill in Calif.



AP Photo: Legendary game show host Bob Barker, 83, waves to the audience during taping of his...

By STEVE LAWRENCE, Associated Press Writer

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. - A bill to reduce the number of unwanted dogs and cats by requiring the spaying or neutering of pets has won approval in the state Assembly — with a little help from retiring "The Price is Right" host Bob Barker.

The measure passed the Assembly by a 41-38 vote Wednesday, the bare majority it needed to move to the Senate.

Supporters mounted a lobbying effort that included phone calls to wavering Democrats by Barker, who contacted lawmakers after hosting his final show Wednesday.

He had ended each show by asking that viewers spay or neuter their pets. Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, the bill's sponsor, said he also had support from singer [Lionel Richie](#).

"Bob Barker, Lionel Richie — we had a lot of help on this," Levine said after the vote. "It's a huge team effort."

The bill would require most dogs and cats to be spayed or neutered by the time they are 4 months old, the age at which they begin to reach sexual maturity. Failure to have the procedure could result in a \$500 fine for owners.

Levine said the bill was needed to ease a huge population of unwanted pets that is costing state and local governments \$300 million a year.

The bill includes several exceptions, including for show animals, police dogs and guide dogs and for animals that are too old or ill to be spayed or neutered.

Critics of the bill called it "micromanaging at its worst" and feared it would force breeders and other pet owners to pay "extortion fees" to get exceptions.

Levine promised to amend the bill in the state Senate to allow any dog or cat owner to buy a permit that would allow the animal to remain unfixed and have one litter a year. The permit would have to be renewed annually.

Levine also said he would modify the bill's language to ensure that a pet owner cited for failure to have an animal spayed or neutered would not have to pay the \$500 fine if he or she agreed to have the animal fixed.

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