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## California should require spaying and neutering of pets

By Hope Hedrick

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To spay and neuter or not to spay and neuter, that is the question.

Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, D-Van Nuys, veterinarians, animal control officers and animal advocates are in strong support of the position taken by the California Healthy Pets Coalition.

It is their strong, burning intention to convince the citizens, voters and taxpayers of California to pass Assembly Bill 1634, the California Healthy Pets Act 2008 bill in the upcoming California state legislative session. This bill will affect those individuals who have dogs and cats as companion pets, because it will require these animals to be spayed or neutered by six months of age.

It will also affect individuals who allow their pets to roam and breed at random and the backyard pet breeders or puppy mills, which operate outside of the state law by not reporting and paying taxes on the sales of their products, which are intact healthy dogs or cats.

The bill will require them to comply with the law the same as reputable licensed pet breeders, who do report and pay taxes on their sales. Every

breeder will be required to purchase and possess an intact dog or cat permit.

Why does this matter to all of us?

An estimate of \$2 billion over a 10 year period from 1995 to 2005 shows the amount of money wasted to house and kill unwanted, healthy, adoptable pets.

Shelters are extremely overcrowded, and we as taxpayers are paying for the neglect and mistakes of irresponsible pet owners and backyard pet breeders.

Currently, the voluntary spay and neuter laws are not working, as evidenced by the 800,000 unwanted pets that still end up at the shelters each year. If you don't believe it, then go see it for yourself. Thousands of kittens and puppies are brought into this world to be abandoned into shelters and thus put to death.

Unaltered aggressive dogs endanger our neighborhoods because they are most likely to attack people, especially children.

AB 1634 is a step toward reducing the enormous state fiscal burden and the overpopulation of unwanted healthy pets.

Critics who oppose this bill say that there is an increased risk of serious adverse effects such as cancer by spaying or neutering immature dogs. In fact, studies shows that there are more benefits than risks for dogs to be spayed or neutered at a young age. Despite what critics say, this idea has

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been tested and is successful.

The spay and neuter ordinance of Santa Cruz County shows that between its passage in 1995 to 2003, there was a greater than 55 percent decrease in the number of dogs and a greater than 63 percent decrease in the number of cats in their shelters.

Stanislaus County data shows a 10 percent decline in the number of unwanted pets in shelters with its new spay and neuter ordinance, just since 2006.

The jurisdictions of Santa Cruz and Stanislaus counties have proven data and records that mandatory spay and neuter ordinances are quite effective. This shows strong evidence and should alert taxpayers to the need to pass AB 1634.

The common-sense solution to this pet overpopulation crisis is for us as citizens, voters and taxpayers to support this bill.

Call and write letters to your state legislators, Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, and to local newspapers to get the word out and thus voice your support. It is a privilege to own and have pets, but responsibility comes with that privilege.

It is our tax dollars. Would we rather save that money and have it put to better use?

Supporting the AB 1634 is the right and smart thing to do.

To learn more about this bill, visit the Web site

[www.cahealthypets.com](http://www.cahealthypets.com).

Get involved, show your support. Let's save the lives of pets and have safer communities.

Hope Hedrick is a sophomore veterinary student at Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona.

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