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Snip it or ticket

State now weighing legislation similar to LA's mandatory pet sterilization law

By Nikki Bazar



law passed by the Los Angeles City Council requiring the spaying and neutering of pets is being hailed by neighboring communities as a step in the right direction and a boost for similar legislation at the state level.

"Each year, we spend over \$300 million on animal control services, primarily for the housing, care, feeding and ultimately the euthanization and disposal of animals. Now, I find that a fiscal catastrophe and a moral crisis," said Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, D-Van Nuys, author of Assembly Bill 1634, a similar mandatory sterilization bill set for Senate committee consideration sometime this spring.

The Los Angeles ordinance, which passed 10 to 1 with only Councilman Bill Rosendahl dissenting, is subject to a second reading next week before going into effect, but will most likely pass, making sterilization of all LA's pets over 4 months old mandatory as of October.

Neighboring cities are taking notice.

"What we'd like to see in Pasadena is a sterilization program that is mandatory but has avenues so that people who are low-income can get it accomplished," said Steve McNall, president and CEO of the Pasadena Humane Society.

"Also, we want to make sure the law is enforceable. The



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ordinance that passed in LA is a great start, but it's not the magic bullet," said McNall.

"Ideally, I would like to see every person be responsible for spaying or neutering their pet," said Alice Russell, director of the Glendale Humane Society. "But it doesn't work that way, and there's such a huge overpopulation and so many wonderful dogs and cats are euthanized."

Last Friday's LA council hearing attracted a raucous crowd of supporters and opponents of the mandatory sterilization ordinance, which was introduced by Councilman Richard Alarcón.

Under the ordinance, pet owners in violation will initially be given a notice to comply and information regarding free and subsidized sterilization services. After 60 days, owners still not in compliance will be subject to a \$100 fine or eight hours of community service. A third offense could bring a penalty of \$500 or 40 hours of community service.

There are exemptions for licensed breeders, trainers and groomers, as well as those training service and rescue dogs. Pet owners with a letter from a licensed veterinarian may also qualify for exemptions.

The ordinance also calls for the establishment of an advisory committee that will regularly report back to the city Board of Animal Services on the impact of the law on low-income residents.

At the meeting, council members heard from numerous protesters and supporters of the ordinance, including celebrity game show host and longtime sterilization advocate Bob Barker, INXS band member Garry Beers and Levine.

The ordinance's opponents cited statistics suggesting that 4 months is too young and could endanger the pet's health. Some also took issue with the imposition on their rights as pet owners.

"Many veterinarians oppose mandatory spay and neuter laws," said Sharon Shilkoff, secretary of Concerned Dog Owners of California. "I do microchip my dog, I do spay and neuter my dogs, but I spay and neuter my dogs as a decision made between my veterinarian and myself."

"This is my property," said another opponent. "I do happen to believe in spaying and neutering. I do not think it is any business of any government to mandate when I do it."

The council's nearly unanimous vote met with thunderous applause. Supporters of AB 1634 were especially excited about what it might mean for the fate of that bill.

"It will definitely give us the momentum to get it through the rest of the way," said Judie Mancuso, a proponent of the bill, also known as the California Healthy Pets Act. "We're very hopeful and very excited about it. It's good news for the animals."

Opponents of AB 1634 have not lost hope. After the vote, Bill Hemby from the Pet Political Action Committee (PetPAC) told the Pasadena Weekly that the group's next step will be organizing an education campaign.

"The other aspect is we are going to kill AB 1634 in the state Legislature," Hemby said. "We are going back to Sacramento to do that."

The Pasadena Humane Society offers SNiP, a low-cost public spay and neuter program for residents of Pasadena, South Pasadena, Sierra Madre, Glendale, Arcadia, La Cañada Flintridge and San Marino. Call (626) 792-7151 and the shelter will refer you

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to a nonprofit rescue organization that provides low-cost
sterilization.

"Early-age sterilization has shown to be very successful," said
McNall of Pasadena. "We've been doing it for 10 years now and
it's been no problem whatsoever." ●

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