Opposing new spay and neuter ordinance

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We oppose the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance being considered by the Chicago City Council. We strongly encourage spaying and neutering. Unfortunately, the rosy picture painted by the mandatory spay/neuter enthusiasts is far from complete, and support for the measure within the animal care community is hardly unanimous.

Proponents refer to the proposed measure as the “Pet Overpopulation and Safety Ordinance.” That name is misleading, implying that the ordinance will positively impact pet overpopulation, while making our streets safer. Available evidence doesn’t support either assertion. Where mandatory spay/neuter laws have been passed, they’ve failed to achieve their stated purposes and result in unintended, highly undesirable consequences. Routine veterinary visits decline because non-compliant owners fear being reported. This isn’t in the best interest of pets. Also, fewer visits to the veterinarian results in a reduction of rabies vaccinations. In Fort Worth, Texas, declining vaccination compliance in the wake of new spay/neuter requirements led to a rabies outbreak; their spay/neuter law was hurriedly rescinded.

Proponents suggest that police need the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance as an additional tool to deal with gangs and dogfighters, but there are already a myriad of laws that could be utilized, including dog-licensing laws, vaccination requirements and leash laws.

Supporters assert that mandatory spaying and neutering will make Chicago safer from biting dogs, but neutering does not magically eliminate or prevent aggression. While hormones matter, behaviorists agree early socialization, genetics, appropriate care and supervision are far more significant.

Although, there are more than 1 million dogs in Chicago, only about 20,000, less than 2 percent, are licensed. Should the City Council approve mandatory spay/neuter, that already low compliance will further decline. Owners won't license because they don't want to get caught.

Perhaps most disturbing about the mandatory approach is that a proven, cost-effective, alternative model already exists. Unlike the failed mandatory measures that punish non-compliance, subsidized spay/neuter programs rewarding positive behavior are successful. Privately funded, large-scale, subsidized spay/neuter programs already exist in Chicago. Together these programs were responsible for nearly 20,000 low-cost or no-cost spay/neuters last year alone (along with the tens of thousands of sterilizations performed each year by private veterinarians).

The success of the current voluntary approach calls into question the need for any new law.

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--Ann Dieter President, Harmony House for Cats
--Elizabeth Curran, President, Lake Shore Animal Shelter
--Marcia Coburn President, Red Door Animal Shelter
--Dr. Colleen Currigan Board president, Tree House Humane Society
--Dr. Sheldon Rubin President, Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association
--Dr. Shannon Greeley President, Chicago Veterinary Medical Association

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