

Testimony Concerning Raised Bill 5446

**Lizanne M. Bennett, President
Bandit's Place, Inc., Animal Rescue**

I would like to thank the Environmental Committee for the opportunity to express my support of Raised Bill, 5446; **An Act Concerning the Payment Procedure for the Sterilization and Vaccination of Certain Dogs and Cats and Providing for Animal Control Officer Training.**

I am a registered voter in Hartland, Connecticut, and I am the president and founder of Bandit's Place, Inc., Animal Rescue as well as a former animal control officer for the town of Granby, Connecticut.

I would like to address the issues in the Raised Bill individually, if I might.

First, I applaud the State's Animal Population Control Program. In my opinion, it has greatly reduced the issue of over population of dogs and cats and has raised a wonderful awareness among the general public about the *importance* of spaying and neutering. That having been said, I cannot, however, support the State's current position in that we as animal control officers can *euthanize* an animal that has come into our shelter however we cannot spay or neuter it. I was advised at a yearly meeting of animal control officers that the town (any town) "owns" the impounded animal and can euthanize it however the town is not allowed to sterilize it prior to adoption because it does not "own" it to that extent. This made absolutely no sense to me or to any other animal control officer present and it did raise quite a stir. If the State is truly concerned about keeping the stray animal population under control it would only make sense to allow for the sterilization of the animal by the holding town prior to adoption.

I have worked with various shelters across the United States and I believe that in Kentucky there is a law that states that if an unsterilized animal is impounded more than once (and is known to be owned), that animal is sterilized prior to release at the owner's expense. What forethought!

I do know that some veterinary hospitals charge above and beyond what the Animal Population Control vouchers charge for the actual sterilization, so *the new owner is not actually saving any money* and therefore *is not an incentive for the new owner*. The Animal Population Control Program charges \$45.00 for the animal under the voucher program. The town charges \$5.00 for the legalization of the adoption. The participating veterinary hospital can charge their normal fee for the sterilization, minus the \$45.00 the adopter has already spent. This can come to a total of \$200 to \$300 for the new owner *in addition* to what they've just paid the State. If the State allowed animal control officers to put the animals through the program for the \$45.00, the adopter would not have to incur that additional expense and the issue of preventing over population would be more successful.

As to the second part of the Raised Bill, I can only say “Bravo”! After interacting with animal control officers over my span of 18 years on the police department in Granby, I can say, without a doubt, that all animal control officers are NOT created equal. I was extremely fortunate that I had both veterinary and law enforcement background prior to taking the position however at that time the only requirement for the position was a high school diploma. The animal control officer before me was a farmer.

In general, animal control officers are at the bottom of the list for ANY training, etc., however they are, in some towns, allowed to carry weapons. Any training the animal control officer receives is either through on the job experience or working with another animal control officer. I have spoken to several animal control officers through the years and I can say that all of them would be thrilled for a formalized training program.

Animal control officers can be the window to the department they represent. A poorly trained animal control officer can give an extremely negative image of that department and may cost that department the funding it needs come budget time. A poor image put forth by that animal control officer can go a long, long way.

Animal control officers are expected to uphold the laws of the State and are at times required to prepare arrest warrant applications and search warrant applications. Unless that animal control officer is knowledgeable about how to write these documents, they may be refused, allowing a situation such as animal cruelty to continue.

An animal control officer has the power of arrest and hence there is an enormous liability held by the town by which that animal control officer is employed. An untrained or poorly trained animal control officer can put that town at risk simply with the stroke of a pen.

Animal control officers are sometimes allowed to carry weapons. The liability alone on this issue is just dumbfounding if that animal control officer is not trained *regularly* on that weapon.

It is, therefore, imperative that the animal control officer not only receive initial training (Massachusetts, I believe, has an academy for animal control officer training) but for continued training throughout his or her career. I urge you to support this crucial part of the Raised Bill.

I thank you for your time and attention to this testimony. I implore you to support both parts of the Raised Bill as I do feel that they are an extremely important forward step for all towns in Connecticut. Decreasing the liability of towns and municipalities should be first and foremost in the minds of all. Supporting this bill would go a long way towards that end.

Sincerely,

Liz Bennett; President & Founder
Bandit's Place, Inc., Animal Rescue
860-653-0558