



**Testimony of Debora M. Bresch, Esq.
Senior Director, Government Relations, ASPCA
President, CT Votes for Animals**

In Opposition to HB 5408 – An Act Concerning Adoption Fees for Dogs

**Joint Planning and Development Committee
March 9, 2012**

Senator Cassano, Representative Gentile, and fellow Planning and Development Committee members, thank you for this opportunity to comment on **House Bill 5408 (An Act Concerning Adoption Fees for Dogs)**. As many of you know, my name is Debora Bresch, and I am an attorney and lobbyist with the Government Relations Department of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), which counts **almost 22,000 Connecticut residents among its supporters**. I am also President of CT Votes for Animals (CVA).

HB 5408 would authorize a municipality to assess the cost of sterilization and vaccination to an adopter or purchaser of a cat or dog from a public shelter. The ASPCA and CVA support the principle underlying HB 5408 - that cats and dogs should be spayed prior to release to the public - but not the mechanism by which this bill seeks to accomplish this.

Under Connecticut law, in return for \$45, every adopter of a cat or dog from a municipal shelter receives an Animal Population Control Program (APCP) voucher that may be applied toward the cost of sterilization and vaccination by a participating veterinarian. Pursuant to CGS §22-380i, a veterinarian who receives a voucher from an adopter will be reimbursed by the APCP as follows: \$20 for vaccinations plus a preset amount for sterilization based on the animal's sex and species - i.e., \$120 for a female dog, \$100 for a male dog, \$70 for a female cat, and \$50 for a male cat. The APCP statute does not cap the fee that may be charged by a participating veterinarian for sterilization and vaccination, and an adopter would be responsible for any difference

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between the value of the voucher and the actual cost. The ASPCA and CVA view this as a central flaw in the APCP, especially with respect to its low-income and feral cat programs, but also with respect to its public shelter program, given the possibility that the prospect of extremely costly sterilization and vaccinations could deter adoption, or could deter use of the voucher post-adoption. Presently, only a little more than 2/3 of adopters from Connecticut's public shelters use the vouchers they are given; the remaining adopters allow the vouchers to lapse.

Under HB 5408, if a municipality were to sterilize/vaccinate a dog or cat prior to purchase/adoption, it is not clear what would happen to the APCP vouchers - and in particular, their cash value - to which all adopters from that town's shelter would be entitled. However, even if the municipality could in some way arrange for the vouchers' use, the cost of the sterilization/vaccinations would remain uncapped, allowing a municipality to charge in excess of what many adopters from the public shelter could afford. Again, the consequence could be decreased adoptions - particularly if an adopter would no longer have the option of shopping for the least expensive participating veterinarian.

As noted above, the ASPCA and CVA without question support pre-release sterilization and vaccinations. However, we believe that HB 5446 - legislation raised in the Environment Committee that would simply give animal control officers access to APCP vouchers prior to a cat or dog's release to an adopter - would be the better first step. Animal control officers could use the vouchers at area low-cost spay/neuter clinics prior to the animal's release - there are currently two such clinics in Connecticut, and a third is anticipated in the next year - where the vouchers would cover the full cost of the procedure. Or perhaps an animal control officer would be able to make an arrangement with a local veterinarian to accept the vouchers alone in exchange for all the shelter's business.

Ultimately, before we allow municipalities to charge adopters what they wish for cat and dog sterilizations and vaccinations as HB 5408 would permit, the ASPCA and CVA would seek passage of HB 5446, so that animal control officers would simply have access to APCP vouchers prior to a cat or dog's release.