



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

*Office of Steven K. Reviczky
Commissioner*



**Testimony presented to the Environment Committee of
The Connecticut General Assembly
By the Connecticut Department of Agriculture
March 15, 2013**

**H. B. 5836 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING FOR THE
VACCINATION, STERILIZATION AND HEART WORM TESTING OF DOGS AND
CATS OWNED BY LOW INCOME PERSONS OR ADOPTED FROM MUNICIPAL OR
REGIONAL SHELTERS**

Chairmen Meyer and Gentile, Vice Chairs Maynard and Albis, Ranking Members Chapin and Shaban and members of the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

The Animal Population Control Program (APCP) was created by statutory language in 1992 and implemented on May 22, 1995, to provide vaccination and sterilization benefits for any unsterilized dog or cat adopted from a municipal impound facility in Connecticut. Program goals are to reduce pet overpopulation, reduce the spread of rabies and other diseases through immunizations and subsequently increase the effectiveness of local Animal Control Departments through education and law enforcement. The APCP program has by all accounts been very successful, vaccinating and sterilizing more than 80,000 animals since 1995. Most Connecticut veterinary practices participate in the program. To utilize this program, a Connecticut resident must pay a \$45.00 fee at the time of adoption, which entitles the adopter to a vaccination/sterilization voucher good for sixty days. The voucher provides a one-time sterilization benefit of \$50.00 for a male cat, \$70.00 for a female cat, \$100.00 for a male dog, and \$120.00 for a female dog plus two pre-surgical vaccinations coincident with the sterilization. In addition, adopters are required to pay for other services as specified by the veterinarian. Non-residents may adopt a pound pet and pay a \$5.00 municipal fee, but are not eligible for program benefits. Pets too young or sick may be granted a medical extension by the veterinarian; however, all young animals must be sterilized by six (6) months of age. Funding for the APCP comes from an annual surcharge on Connecticut dog licenses (\$2.00 sterilized/\$6.00 unsterilized), the \$45.00 adoption fee, proceeds from the sale of the "Caring for Pets" commemorative license plates and donations.

Local animal control programs are largely underfunded, under staffed and underappreciated for their contribution to public health, public safety, animal welfare and quality of life. Feral cats are a serious issue in many communities contributing to quality of life issues, disease among the cats, impact on native bird populations, and feral cats are a vector in the spread of rabies among animals and potentially humans who may come in contact with a rabid feral cat. Municipal feral cat programs are voluntary (C.G.S. § 22-



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339) and few towns have taken on that responsibility as budgets and personnel are limited. It is very unlikely that this proposal will increase municipal feral cat programs. Very few towns have the resources to permit animal control officers to take on the additional duties of running new programs or managing the distribution of monies to non-profits for feral cats or low income spay/neuter benefit programs.

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture is concerned that, while well intentioned, the proposed bill will not achieve the desired goals and would offer the following suggestions and commentary:

The title of this bill indicates that heartworm testing is included. We agree that it should be but heartworm language is not present in this proposal.

- 1. In line 14 delete "animal control officers and". We do not believe this change is needed as very few animal control officers work with feral cats and or groups. Additional language is not required for those few that do. The Department of Agriculture's Animal Population Control Program (APCP) provides a list of feral cat groups to Municipal Animal Control Officers so they know who to turn to if they need assistance in that area.**
- 2. Lines 17 -20 are not necessary. The APCP has such a program in place right now. The APCP works with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to certify that low-income individuals meet the definition requirements pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 22-380e (12)(A)(B)(C)(D)(E)(F)and (G). Permitting ACOs to make these decisions is not necessary. Allowing private organizations (registered non-profits) to decide who gets to access APCP funds would be a nightmare for the APCP to track and administer. Presently, the program sends blank applications for the low income program to all ACOs, veterinarians', town clerks and every DSS office in the state. The circulation of information for the low income program is statewide. In order to properly administer the program the Department should be in control of the distribution and accountability of all benefits.**
- 3. Lines 32 - 36 should be deleted. Disseminating vouchers to municipal ACOs and nonprofits and allowing decisions to be made regarding APCP funding outside of the Department would create a very difficult tracking problem. The statutory screening process that is already in place with DSS serves this purpose. Requiring DSS to work with each municipal ACO or several private non-profit groups would not be an efficient use of limited state resources. Most nonprofits struggle with few volunteers and municipal ACOs will be reluctant to increase their paper work and their reporting requirements to the state. Definitional problems will arise when determining what is a registered non-profit group and with whom they are to register.**



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4. **Lines 67 – 71 establish new criteria for payments specific to low income applicants. Presently, the payments are made based on the sex of the animal as the sterilization procedures for each sex are different and have different costs. Basing payments on the weight of the animal adds unneeded complexity and would require separate forms as well as upgrades to the software used to track expenses.**
5. **Lines 92 - 99: It is not clear to us what this language intends. As written the language would require reimbursement for any (all?) vaccinations the veterinarian feels are necessary. No monetary limits for specific vaccinations are placed on this benefit as is the case in the existing language.**

The department generally agrees that the spay/neuter programs need to reach more pet owners.

The department respectfully asks that our suggestions be considered and that we have the opportunity to work with the proponents of this bill, veterinarians, non-profit groups and municipal animal control officers to craft language for the 2014 session to address the needs identified in this proposal. Additionally, the reimbursement rate for spay/neuter and vaccination procedures has not been updated since 2000. It is time to look at the payments for these procedures. We would like the opportunity to work with stakeholders to better use APCP funding to bolster local animal control programs, address the feral cat issues and provide realistic payments to veterinarians so low income pet owners are not disenfranchised.