



THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

**Testimony of Debora M. Bresch, Esq.
Senior State Director, MidAtlantic Region
Government Relations**

- **In Support of REVISING HB 6323 – An Act Concerning Adoption Fees for Dogs**
- **In Support of HB 6311 - An Act Prohibiting Municipalities from Adopting Breed-Specific Dangerous Dog Ordinances**

**Joint Planning and Development Committee
February 20, 2012**

Senator Cassano, Representative Rojas, and fellow Planning and Development Committee members, thank you for this opportunity to comment on **House Bill 6323 (An Act Concerning Adoption Fees for Dogs)** and **House Bill 6311 (An Act Prohibiting Municipalities from Adopting Breed Specific Dangerous Dog Ordinances)**. 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**.

HB 6323 - An Act Concerning Adoption Fees for Dogs

HB 6323 would authorize municipalities to assess the cost of sterilization and vaccination to an adopter or purchaser of a cat or dog from a public shelter. **The ASPCA supports the fundamental principles underlying HB 6323 - that cats and dogs should be vaccinated upon admission to a shelter and spayed prior to release - and hopes the proposed bill can be revised to accomplish these crucial objectives.**

As a result of Public Act 12-108, enacted in the 2012 session, Connecticut animal control officers (ACOs) are now permitted to use Animal Population Control Program (APCP) vouchers to pay for the sterilization of shelter dogs and cats prior to release to an adopter. An adopter would still pay \$45 for an APCP voucher, but the ACO would submit the voucher - and animal - to a veterinarian for the procedure,

The APCP reimburses veterinarians \$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. Unfortunately, the APCP statute does not cap the fee that a participating veterinarian may charge for sterilization and vaccination, and, in most cases, a voucher will not cover anywhere near the full cost of the procedure charged by a private veterinarian. However, passing this cost on to the public could deter adoptions. **The ASPCA would thus propose a cap (e.g., \$50) on what towns may charge adopters for spay/neuter (beyond the \$45 an adopter already pays for an APCP voucher).** In the long run, our hope is that the APCP will be appropriately structured and funded to ensure adequate availability of low-cost options, as has happened in New York State.

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Similarly, the ASPCA would support imposition of a reasonable cap on what towns may charge adopters for the vaccination of their dogs and cats. The ASPCA believes that shelter animals should be vaccinated at intake. Unfortunately, the APCP voucher will, at best, pay for the vaccination of a shelter animal just prior to release to an adopter. And if an animal has entered the shelter already sterilized, the APCP will not pay for vaccinations at all (although current proposed bill, HB 5836, would correct this latter problem). We accept that prophylactic vaccinations at intake would likely require assessment of an additional fee to adopters but would, again, simply request that this fee be capped at a reasonable sum (perhaps equivalent to the cost of vaccines under the APCP - i.e., \$20).

HB 6311 (An Act Prohibiting Municipalities from Adopting Breed Specific Dangerous Dog Ordinances)

The ASPCA unreservedly supports passage of HB 6311.

Thirteen states, including New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, expressly prohibit the enactment of local laws that purport to regulate dangerous dogs based upon breed. And this is for good reason - breed-specific dangerous dog laws do not work. Rather than address the reckless dog ownership practices that give rise to dog aggression, breed-specific dangerous dog ordinances succeed only in separating countless innocent dogs from their families - often to be euthanized - merely because they have been deemed to have characteristics typical of the banned breed. Notably, a Prince George's County task force has recommended repeal of the county's ban, and Ohio repealed its statewide breed-specific law.

In fact, **there is no evidence of one breed being more dangerous than another.** According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), many factors affect dog aggression such as sex, early experience, socialization and training, health (medical and behavioral), reproductive status, and quality of ownership and supervision. Dog chaining is also associated with increased aggression. In addition, it is often not clear what a dog's breed is. In most cases, dog attacks stem from reckless or misinformed dog-ownership, including abusive training or neglect, not the suspected breed of the dog. Any dog, with proper socialization, training, and spaying/neutering, is likely to become a friendly pet.

By contrast, **there is substantial evidence that breed-neutral laws are effective in preventing dog attacks.** For example, in Multnomah County, Oregon, a breed-neutral ordinance imposing graduated penalties on dogs and owners according to the seriousness of the dogs' behavior has reduced repeat injurious bites from 25 percent to 7 percent. Ultimately, dangerous dog laws must focus on canine behaviors that *actually* indicate whether a dog may be a threat to others, as well as the human behaviors that give rise to dog aggression. Such laws should emphasize reproductive status and incentivize spay/neuter; hold owners criminally and civilly liable for unjustified injury and allow for victim injury compensation; impose adequate fines that are used to supplement animal control budget; and target inhumane practices such as animal cruelty and dog chaining.