Re: SUPPORT (WITH AMENDMENT) SB 349, AN ACT CONCERNING REGIONAL ANIMAL SHELTERS

Dear Co-Chair Kennedy, Co-Chair Miner, Co-Chair Demicco, Vice Chair Flexer, Vice Chair Gresko, Vice Chair Somers, Ranking Member Harding, and Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

On behalf of the Connecticut-based supporters of The Humane Society of the United States, the largest animal protection organization in the country, please accept this public hearing testimony SUPPORT (WITH AMENDMENT) of SB 349, which would divert limited APCP funds to the costs of operating regional shelters, and away from programs that are striking at the root of the pet overpopulation problem.

While we understand the seriousness of the state’s budgetary concerns, this diversion of funds is ill-advised and shortsighted, and will not only quickly reverse animal welfare progress made in Connecticut, but will, in the near-immediate future, result in an increased financial burden on municipalities and animal control agencies – including those that utilize regional shelters.

Two populations of animals (unowned cats and pets in low-income communities) have been shown to have the lowest rates of sterilization and lead to more unwanted dogs and cats, creating a burden on municipalities and many Connecticut-based nonprofit animal welfare entities. The APCP has wisely focused on these two populations with its “Low-Income Program” and its “Feral Cat Grant Program”. By focusing on these two segments of the animal population, Connecticut is making a positive difference in pet overpopulation and future resource expenditures. By not properly funding the program for unowned cats, all strides made to address this population will quickly be lost as unsterilized cats are allowed to reproduce. The Feral Cat Grant Program is a hugely successful, cost-saving, proactive solution that helps relieve the already stretched animal care infrastructure: community cat caregivers provide a public service at oftentimes great personal expense, reducing cat overpopulation through TNR (trap, neuter, return) programs, a science-based approach that has been proven effective.

States all over the country recognize that public policies that promote spay/neuter are a proactive, equitable way to stem the root cause of pet overpopulation and create cost-savings in the long run. As with thirty-five other states, Connecticut allows pet owners and advocates to directly fund a program
that is utilized by state residents: the APCP is funded by dog licensing fees (~68%), adoption fees (~27%), and animal welfare license plate sales (~5%). Yet these funds earmarked for the APCP have been regularly raided. Over $1 million has been swept from the account in recent years, and the Governor’s 2017 mitigation budget just swept $150K.

Per CGS 22-380g, (b) and (c), only up to 10% of APCP income shall be used for the Feral Cat Grant Program and only up to 20% of APCP income shall be used for the Low-Income Program. Instead of diverting APCP income to regional shelters, the statutory limitations on these programs should be raised to 30% for each of these programs, since it is these programs which are most efficiently addressing pet overpopulation by directly targeting populations with the lowest rates of sterilizations. It should be noted that the Feral Cat Grant Program has a 99% voucher compliance rate.

Underfunding these two critical programs would be moving in precisely the wrong direction, and will result in greater costs down the road for community cat caregivers, municipalities, and the state.

(Please note typo in line 63: “22a-331” should be “22-331a.”)

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,

Annie Hornish
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