

Testimony from Susan B. Linker

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In opposition of Raised Bill 999 AN ACT CONCERNING THE FEE FOR ADOPTING A DOG, CAT OR OTHER DOMESTIC ANIMAL FROM A MUNICIPAL POUND AND REQUIRING THE LICENSING OF SUCH CATS AND OTHER DOMESTIC ANIMALS.



Dear Co-Chair Cohen, Co-Chair Demicco, Vice Chair Kushner, Vice Chair Gresko, Ranking Member Harding, Ranking Member Miner, and Honorable Members of the Environment Committee, I ask that you oppose Raised bill 999. Cat licensing laws are expensive, ineffective, and increase the number of cats killed in animal shelters. Only 2 % of all cats at shelters are reclaimed by their owners. Cat licensing is not sound public policy.

It is incorrect to assume all laws that apply to dogs can also be applied to cats. Cats and dogs are different species with unique behaviors and needs. The most significant of these differences is that there are two general categories of cats where the law is concerned: pet cats—owned cats who are socialized to people and live indoors and/or outdoors, and community cats—unowned cats who are not socialized to people, are unadoptable, and live entirely outdoors. When passing laws there should be consideration to how all cats will be impacted and the fact is cat licensing laws harm all cats.

Licensing laws are expensive. Cat licensing programs are notoriously expensive to implement and enforce. Since few people comply with cat licensing requirements, the program’s cost typically exceeds the revenue generated. Rather than contribute to the state’s budget, cats will remain unlicensed and taxpayers will be forced to foot the bill as more cats are impounded and killed. By its nature, licensing increases the number of cats picked up by animal control and brought to shelters, which in turn increases shelter expenses. Taxpayers must pay for feeding and boarding seized cats until owners pick them up or until the minimum holding period expires. Towns must also pay for killing all animals not claimed or adopted, and for body removal and disposal. The intake of community cats in most locations guarantees continual seizures and killing costs, as these animals have no “owners” to claim them and cannot be adopted because they are unsocialized to people.

Cat licensing laws are ineffective. Licensing cats does nothing to ensure cats, both owned cats and community cats, are spayed or neutered and vaccinated. That means licensing does nothing to improve public health, address cat populations, or reduce the number of cats brought to animal shelters and killed. Licensing laws also do not increase the chances of reuniting owners with lost owned cats. Nationally, only 2 percent of impounded owned cats are reunited with their owners, with or without a licensing law. Rather than waste time and resources on a weak law that doesn’t work, communities need to invest in successful, lifesaving programs like low-cost, high-volume spay and neuter services, voluntary and subsidized microchipping, and Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR).

Cat licensing laws result in the death of more cats.

Licensing laws are also incompatible with Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). TNR is the only humane and effective approach to community cats. During TNR, community cats are humanely trapped, spayed or neutered, vaccinated, ear tipped for identification, and returned to their outdoor homes. Since community cats do not have owners, a cat licensing requirement is a death sentence. Caregivers, who are good Samaritans, not owners, of community cats, may be cited by animal control for not licensing the cats or bullied into stopping care. When cats are required to be licensed, all cats are at risk of being brought to an animal shelter. Virtually 100 percent of community cats, brought to animal shelters are killed. As more cats are impounded due to a licensing law, even more will be killed, and fewer cats will be returning home.

I strongly urge this committee to oppose this bill and work to find humane and effective proposals to address cats in our community.