## Mandatory Spay/Neuter – A Failure Everywhere

Mandatory spay/neuter (MSN) laws are promoted by groups who claim it will end euthanasia of animals, animal abandonment and shelter overpopulation. There is no success story for mandatory spay/neuter.

### **Summary Points:**

- There is no national "overpopulation crisis" of animals. Nationally numbers of animals euthanized at shelters is at an all time low. Some areas are forced to import animals to fill their shelters even though some states and localities have a surplus.
- MSN fails to address the problem of pet retention. It is undisputable that the number one reason for owner surrender is related to pet behavior or health problems, or the owner's lack of time or ability to care for the pet.
- Areas which have passed this type of legislation have failed to see success in lessening animal abandonment.
- Costs for animal control have greatly increased in areas that pass this type of legislation.
- MSN licensing punishes responsible pet owners and breeders while ignoring irresponsible animal owners.
- MSN will have little or no impact on claims of public health and safety problems caused by unwanted animals which can be better dealt with by enforcing existing laws.
- MSN punishes low income families who can't afford spay/neuter to begin with. This is a reason why low cost spay/neuter programs are much more effective.
- MSN will drive those who cannot afford spay/neuter prices from seeking veterinary services, possibly decreasing rabies vaccinations and increasing rabies outbreaks.
- Nathan Winograd, author of Redemption, notes in one of his many essays that if coercive legislation was effective then Long Beach, CA, where MSN was carried to the extreme of a total breeding ban for 30 years, would have empty shelters or at least be No Kill. Yet Long Beach still handles thousands of animals through animal control services every year.
- Legislation is often thought of as a quick solution to high rates of shelter killing and overcrowded shelters. If punitive legislation such as MSN was effective, there would be No Kill communities nationwide. However, MSN generally has the opposite effect. Communities that have passed these laws are not only far from No Kill, but are moving in the opposite direction.



#### Fort Worth, TX

Ended their experiment with a mandatory sterilization program after licensing compliance fell. As a result there was a reduction in rabies vaccinations and an increase in rabies in the city.

#### San Mateo County, California

The nation's first mandatory spay/neuter law was in San Mateo County, CA. In 1991, dog deaths in the areas governed by the MSN ordinance increased 126% and cats 86%, while areas of the county not covered by MSN laws decreased. Licenses declined by 35%. The ordinance is widely regarded as a legislative failure.

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#### ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF FAILED LEGISLATION

#### Aurora, CO

Enacted a permitting system in 1997 and requires breeder permits as part of its mandatory spay/neuter ordinance. A one year altered dog/cat license is \$15; a one year unaltered dog/cat license is \$142 plus a \$235 litter permit fee. By FY2003 the animal shelter budget had increased to \$1.2 million. Current shelter budget is \$1.9 million. Shelter intake for both cats and dogs has shown little change since enactment of the ordinance.

#### **Buncombe County, NC**

It is hypothesized that forced sterilization of the local animal population reduces shelter intake and subsequently the euthanasia rate of unwanted pets. While at times numbers to support this theory seem to be pulled from thin air, shelter numbers are reported annually to the NC Department of Agriculture hopefully with some semblance of accuracy. Using this data refutes original animal rightist claims that the ordinance has resulted in 60% to 70% reduction in euthanasia rates. Buncombe County budgets for 2004-2006 one year prior to passage of the ordinance and two years after are as follows: 2004-\$ 665,092; 2005-\$696,319; 2006-\$829,688. Shelter intake in 2006 was 7,161. Despite aggressive enforcement by animal control, rigorous public campaigning to spay/neuter all pets in the county, anti-breeder messages, and constant public pressure from animal rights advocates, Buncombe County animal control processed 8,145 animals in 2007. In 2010 shelter intake had dropped to 6,172. By 2013 the budget for animal control had increased to \$1,111,448. 2013 shelter intake had dropped to 5,978 representing an overall decrease in shelter population of only 16.5% since enactment of the mandatory spay neuter ordinance.

#### **Clark County, NV**

From FYs 2005 through 2008, Clark County impounds declined from 9,318 to 7,709, or 17.3 %. MSN was passed in Clark County in 2008. From FY 2008 through 2011, impounds jumped from 7,709 to 10,181, 24.2 %. Euthanasia numbers which increased 24.1 % over the first four-year period before MSN jumped an incredible 80.2 % over the four-year period after MSN.

#### Los Angeles (city)

The ordinance passed in 2000 requires spay/neuter of all dogs and cats unless the owner has obtained a \$100 annual unaltered animal or breeder's permit. A breeder must register all dogs bred for sale and disclose their name and permit number in any ad and on any sale documents. The city also tracks the identity of subsequent owners of the animals sold by breeders. Current cost of a breeder permit is \$235.00 plus an intact license \$100.00. Since the passage of this 2000 "spay or pay" Los Angeles ordinance and subsequent revision in 2008, there has been a decline in dog licensing compliance. It is estimated that only about one-third of the dogs in Los Angeles County are licensed. The animal control budget after passage of the law rose from \$6.7 million to a current \$22.9 million. The city hired additional animal control officers and bought new trucks and equipment just to enforce the new law. Shelter intake for dogs and cats is virtually unchanged from 2010 to 2014.

#### **Montgomery County, MD**

MSN ordinance enacted in 1992. It was estimated that 550 breeding permits would be issued per year; however only an average of 30 permits were issued per year. There was an estimated 50% decline in licensing compliance. The ordinance was repealed after a recommendation by the Legislative Oversight Committee. Currently an altered dog/cat license is \$12/year and an unaltered dog/cat license is \$25/year.