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Healthy Pets Act a life saver

Mandatory sterilization of dogs, cats would cut down on euthanizations

By GARY TISCORNIA
Guest commentary

If you share your life with a dog or cat, I'd like you to take a moment to reflect on your bond. I think of my dog, Sarah, a small border collie mix with a shiny black and white coat. Her preferred positions are on her back in my lap where her belly can be rubbed or in our daughter's bed sleeping the night away. Like most herding dogs, she makes great eye contact. Sometimes she seems to read my mind.

Now that you have a picture of your trusty companion fixed in your mind's eye, consider that last year in Monterey County, 1,926 great, adoptable dogs and cats just like your beloved pets were euthanized.

It's not that they weren't great pets. These were terrific pets. They were the most highly adoptable of the 4,992 dogs and cats euthanized at shelters in Monterey County in 2006. That's 4,992.

The reason is simple: Too many dogs and cats are irresponsibly bred, producing more offspring than there are homes for them.

Some dog and cat owners decry euthanasia and often blame the shelters. It's a simplistic analysis that salves the conscience and places blame but doesn't address the problem. Something that does address the problem, though, is the California Healthy Pets Act (Assembly Bill 1634), the very best chance we have of stopping this death train that has ridden the rails of apathy and self-interest for so many years.

The California Healthy Pets Act would mandate sterilization of dogs and cats over four months of age unless they are a recognized purebred or service dog. Owners of these animals could purchase an "intact permit" allowing them to maintain an "intact animal" to breed. The permit would be issued by their local animal control agency for a reasonable fee not to exceed the actual administration cost. Failure to procure a permit could result in a \$500 penalty if an owner repeatedly refused to comply.

In Monterey County, money from the fines would supplement existing voucher and low-cost sterilization programs to assure that everyone required to sterilize pets could easily afford it. Santa Cruz County implemented sterilization requirements similar to the California Healthy Pets Act in 1995 and has seen more than a 50 percent reduction in animals requiring shelter. Santa Cruz County has demonstrated in concrete terms that this approach works. Fewer dogs and cats in shelters mean fewer dogs and cats needlessly losing their lives for lack of a home.

The bill affects all of us. Taxpayers will not have to pay for construction and operation of expanded shelters because fewer animals will be unwanted or running at large. Breeders will no longer have to compete for quality homes with backyard breeders interested in a quick buck as they give undeservedly bad reputations to some breeds. The senseless deaths of many pets like yours and mine will be prevented.

Imagine your pet in a shelter waiting to be adopted and being repeatedly passed over for younger, more charismatic animals. Irresponsible breeders left my Sarah with less than 24 hours to live. Thousands of others just like her have not been so fortunate.

We're a country of animal lovers who lavish over \$30 billion a year on toys, food, treats, day care, boarding and veterinary care every year. Surely we can commit to enacting this bill. Please let your legislators know that you want them to vote for the California Healthy Pets Act.

For full text of the bill and links to related information, see www.SPCAmc.org.

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