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Animal control

Bill proposes altering of cats, dogs by age 4 months

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DOWNEY - A state Assembly bill - to be heard in committee today - that calls for pet cats and dogs across the state to be spayed or neutered by age 4 months is getting strong support from local animal control officials.

Assembly Bill 1634, also known as the California Healthy Pets Act of 2007, would make spaying and neutering of pets mandatory by age 4 months, with owners facing a citation for not complying.

Those cited would have 30 days - or as much as 75 days, but only with a note from a veterinarian - to have their pets sterilized or face a fine of at least \$500 per pet.

The bill, authored by Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, D-Van Nuys, is scheduled to go before the Assembly Business and Professions Committee today.

Capt. Aaron Reyes, director of operations for the Southeast Area Animal Control Authority in Downey, said the proposal - AB 1634 - has been needed in California for a long time.

"We've got to slow down the spigot of animals who are flowing into the agency," Reyes said. "Most animals don't have just one baby, they have several. And you can see the effects quite clearly - they grow in numbers exponentially."

Every year, state officials say, more than 800,000 pets are abandoned in California.

Taxpayers spend \$250 million to house these unwanted cats and dogs in shelters. Thousands of them are euthanized each year.

Unaltered dogs are three times more likely to attack humans and other animals, the bill's supporters say. And California has the highest occurrence of dog bites, animal attacks and attack-related fatalities in the nation, with children as the most common victims, the bill's supporters said.

SEAACA Cpl. Charles Miller said if AB 1634 passes and becomes law, it will allow local authorities to educate residents about sterilizing their pets.

"It's not something where we want to go and start seeking out the violators," Miller said. "We want to work with these individuals, to educate them on the benefits of spaying and neutering. We want to bring them into compliance slowly through this bill."

Officials say, once the bill is law, they also expect a two- to three-year lag before any significant reductions will be seen in the numbers of animals in shelters. The full impact could be seen by the end of the decade, according to animal control officials who back the bill.

The bill makes exceptions for breeders with certified purebred pets; pets deemed by a veterinarian as being too old or sick to undergo the procedure; certified service or guide dogs; and dogs trained and used for law-enforcement purposes.

Whittier resident Israel Sosa, 23, said he believes the proposal is a bad idea.

"We adopted a 3-month-old dog that was fixed, and when we got home, it got sick right away," said Sosa, who was scouting for a dog for his 2-year-old daughter at SEAACA's shelter Monday.

"They should wait until (the pets) are at least a year old," Sosa said. "At 2 or 3 months, they're just too young."

But Reyes said spaying or neutering a young dog or cat is not dangerous to them.

"That's a myth," Reyes said. "Modern recent studies have shown that juvenile spaying and neutering as young as 8 weeks old is healthy for puppies and kittens."

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