

Dear Members of the Chicago City Council,

The Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association recommends that you vote no on the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance that is being proposed within your city. Although the stated goal is to reduce the pet overpopulation problem and reduce gang activity is laudable, this ordinance will have no effect on these problems, create some serious public health concerns, deny necessary health care for many animals and trample on personal property rights of law abiding conscientious pet owners.

The ISVMA opposes this proposed ordinance for the following reasons:

- The ordinance pretends that dog bites will vanish because of the simplistic assumption that only intact animals bite.
- There is no conclusive evidence that mandatory spay/neuter programs work
- This mandatory law will discourage pet owners from seeking rabies immunization if they are opposed to neutering/spaying and fear they will be reported. Currently, we struggle to ensure the proper safeguards are in place to protect the public from rabies. Rabies is essentially a 100% fatal disease to humans, dogs and cats.
- There are not enough resources in Chicago to enforce this law in a meaningful way.
- With regard to creating a healthier pet, there are both positive and negative affects accrued from sterilization. . On balance, it appears that benefits outweigh risks (particularly when you look at the percentages associated with the various negatives); however, there are many breed and individual dog variations, suggesting that professional judgment is required to determine whether and when to neuter/spay pets.

Further details are provided that support our opposition to this ordinance:

- The ordinance pretends that dog bites will vanish because of this law by using a simplistic assumption that only intact animals bite - A study performed by the University of Pennsylvania 2007 (Journal of Injury Prevention Oct;13(5):348-51) found the following results: Records of bites to 111 children were examined. Children <6 years old were most commonly bitten in association with resource guarding (44%), whereas older children were most commonly bitten in association with territory guarding (23%). Similarly, food guarding was the most common circumstance for bites to familiar children (42%) and territory guarding for bites to unfamiliar children (53%).

Behavioral screening of the 103 dogs examined revealed resource guarding (61%) and discipline measures (59%) as the most common stimuli for aggression. Anxiety screens revealed abnormalities in 77% of dogs. **Potential contributory medical conditions were identified/suspected in 50% of dogs.** When history before presentation was known, 66% of dogs had never previously bitten a child, and 19% had never bitten any human. **Most dogs (93%) were neutered, and 66% of owners had taken their dogs to obedience training classes.** CONCLUSIONS: Most children were bitten by dogs with no history of biting children. There is a high rate of behavioral abnormalities (aggression and anxiety) in this canine population. **Common calming measures (neutering, training) were not routinely effective deterrents.**

Relative to the statement "...a 1991 study of medically attended dog bites concluded that sexually intact dogs are 2.6 times more likely to bite than neutered dogs..." We believe the original article to which they are referring is available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/dog3.pdf> ; it was actually published in 1994. Please note that the actual reference in the paper is to intact male dogs (not the more general "sexually intact dogs" as described in this statement). The authors' even state that spayed females may have a higher tendency to bite over intact females. The fact is dog bites are a complex problem that defies easy answers.

- If Chicago was an island and could regulate its borders, then spay or neutering may decrease pet overpopulation. It's possible to identify stories of both success and failure when it comes to mandatory spay/neuter with regard to population control and euthanasia reduction. To be honest, we are not sure if these programs work because generally there are too many confounding factors that make interpretation of euthanasia statistics (when these are even available) extremely difficult and risky to draw conclusions.
- Rabies is essentially a 100% fatal disease to humans, dogs, or cats. This mandatory law will discourage pet owners from seeking immunization if they are opposed to neutering/spaying and fear they will be reported. Spay/neutering is not routinely accepted by many cultures and only through contact with veterinarians can they be educated to change their opinion. Public health officials have worked diligently for years to ensure that rabies is kept under control and the public protected. The cornerstone to control is ensuring as many pets as possible are vaccinated against rabies. This law will definitely result in a decrease in rabies vaccinations, city rabies registrations and owners seeking medical attention for their pet. This cripples the ability to protect the public, provide health care to pets and address the medical problems that may contribute to dog bites.

- There are not enough resources in Chicago to enforce this law in a meaningful way. Responsible, properly educated people are already having their pets sterilized when medically prudent. It will have no effect on gangbangers' compliance which is a major thrust of this legislation. We believe a police officer's time should not be devoted to inspecting female dogs for spay scars and checking male dogs for testicles when much more serious offenses are being perpetrated. Some spayed females will be impossible to determine if they are spayed by sight.
- There are many breed and individual dog variations, suggesting that professional judgment is required to determine whether and when to neuter/spay pets. The statement "Neutering male dogs and cats...reduces the risk of prostatic disease...and infection." May be true but the risk of prostatic cancer is actually higher for neutered dogs. There are some indications that early age spay or neuter may increase the risk of bone cancer in large breed dogs. The concept for mandatory spay/neuter partially originated with feral animals that are managed in colonies but are not euthanized when captured. These pets are not owned by anyone and the goal is to prevent a population explosion. These animals do not have the life expectancy of owned pets, therefore the negative impact of spay/neuter is minimized or unrealized. This concept does not and should not apply to owned pets that are members of families. Their medical decisions should rest with their pet owners who are educated by veterinarians as to when these procedures should be performed with minimum risk and maximum benefit to their pet.

You do not hear an overwhelming call for mandatory spay/neuter laws from animal health professionals because many of the proposed benefits simply cannot be proven. Mandatory spay/neuter laws have had a mixed result in slowing pet overpopulation, placed an undue and unenforceable burden on police and animal control officials, decreased vaccination compliance for rabies, and unintentionally restricted access to healthcare for pets. The idea that this will change a gangbanger's behavior and that all dog attacks will vanish is absurd. These laws may make the alderman feel good that they are addressing a problem, but they create a nightmare for those who have to work with it- veterinarians, police officers, animal control officials, public health providers and the honest law abiding taxpayer. The Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association recommends that this proposal be allowed to die and welcomes a chance to help the city and citizens of Chicago and Illinois craft well written, meaningful and thoughtful animal legislation.

Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association