



NATIONAL ANIMAL INTEREST ALLIANCE

Supporting the people who care for America's animals

July 11, 2008

The Honorable Senator Tom Torlakson
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
State Capitol, Room 5050
Sacramento, CA 95814

Sent via fax: (916) 445-2527

Attention: Mark McKenzie and Bob Franzoia

Subject: Assembly Bill 1634 as amended July 1, 2008 – **Opposition Letter**

Dear Chairman Torlakson and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the National Animal Interest Alliance in opposition to AB 1634, a seriously flawed and costly bill that will come before your Appropriations Committee in just a few days.

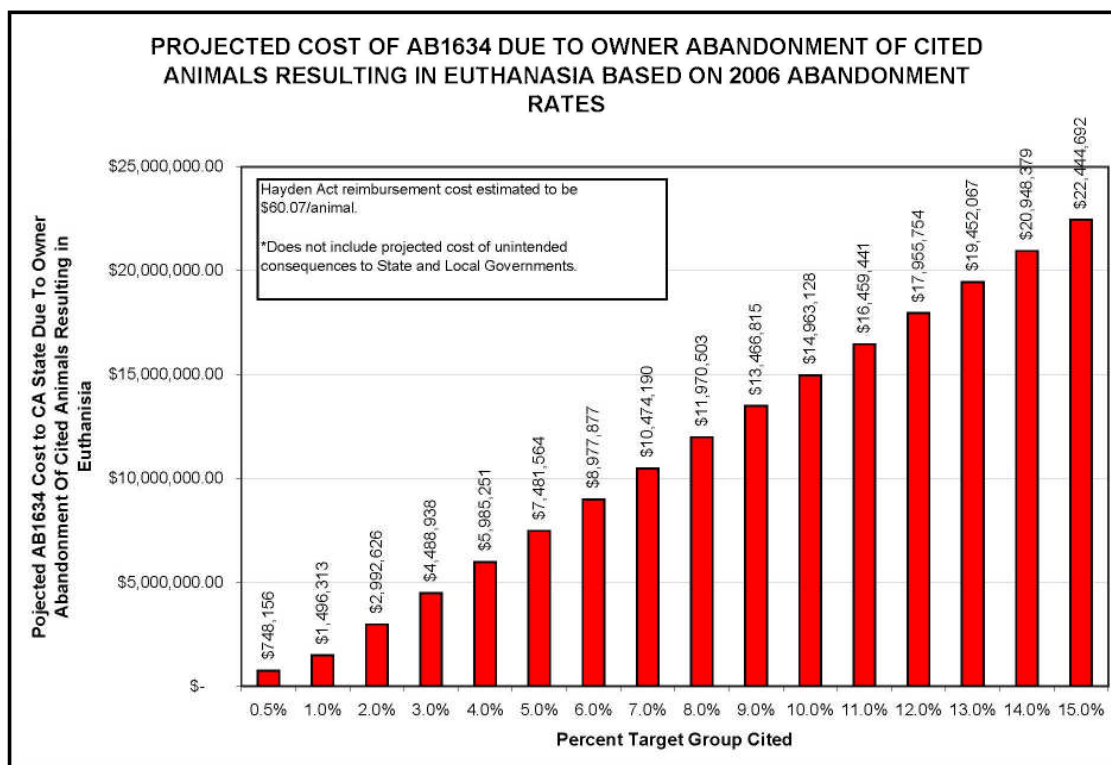
NAIA was founded in 1991 to provide a moderate, balanced, fact-based perspective within the animal welfare and public policy arena. We are proud to represent pet owners and pet professionals in all 50 states with several thousand members in California. NAIA promotes policies that protect the welfare of animals and the rights of responsible animal owners. We oppose AB 1634 not only because it fails on both counts but also because it requires California to squander funds while it injures both.

When considering AB 1634, please keep in mind that the study of pet population dynamics is in its infancy and there are few scientific studies available to guide problem solving in areas such as reducing shelter euthanasia. This is critical, because when proponents of the Hayden Act, a bill that mandated longer shelter hold times for pets, advised the legislature that “the measure would not impose a state-reimbursable mandate because shelters would receive increased adoption and owner-redemption fees,” they may have been sincere, but they were relying on untested theories. Unfortunately, proponents of the Hayden Act were wrong in some of their assumptions and the California Commission on State Mandates found that the additional cost to local governments was a state reimbursable mandate, **one which is estimated to cost California over \$23 million in 2008-2009. 1.**

Today you are being asked to support AB 1634 and once again you are being advised that the measure will not result in additional reimbursements to local governments. The proponents now say that “the bill will be self-funding through the penalties it imposes.” Please be advised that there is no place in the United States where such a theory has ever proven true. In the face of punitive

ordinances, what happens and can be documented in repeated instances is that many people give up their pets or do not reclaim them when they are impounded due to the high fees involved. This leaves pets to occupy our animal shelters until they are either adopted if they are lucky or euthanized if they are not. Because of this well established pattern, the economic impact of AB 1634 could be devastating to California. Using round numbers, if only 1,000 such pets are relinquished or left unclaimed in animal shelters, the cost to California would be more than \$60,000, but that's just a fraction of the actual number of additional animals that will be abandoned and euthanized in California shelters as a result of AB 1634.

Our estimates, which are based on actual outcomes following passage of similarly punitive animal laws in California and other parts of the country, reliably predict that AB 1634 would increase state reimbursements to local governments by a minimum of \$1 million annually and almost assuredly more. 2.



Here's why: It is a well known and undisputed fact among animal control personnel that an inverse relationship exists between license fees and compliance rates and punitive fees and pet relinquishment and abandonment rates.

Generally speaking, the higher the license fee, the lower the compliance rate.

Punitive fines produce a similar result; the higher the fine, the more likely a pet owner is to relinquish

or abandon his pet, or simply not to reclaim it if it is impounded, regardless of whether or not a judgment can be levied against an owner. That is why punitive animal laws and ordinances, from Los Angeles, California to Louisville, Kentucky have resulted in lower licensing compliance rates; increased animal control enforcement costs; higher impound and pet owner relinquishment rates and lower pet-owner reclaim rates. Please see the following recent examples:

- The City of Los Angeles which had seen their dog euthanasia rate decline by 67% between 2002 and the end of 2007 passed a punitive mandatory spay-neuter law on February 1, 2008. So far this year they have seen a 20% increase in dog intakes and a 32% increase in dog euthanasias. 3.
- In December 2006, Louisville, Kentucky passed a punitive pet ordinance that imposed a number of burdensome fees, unaltered pet license fees, expensive licenses, and punitive restrictions. This ordinance is currently the subject of a lawsuit brought by the citizens of Louisville. Information that was obtained from a deposition taken in that court action shows that shelter intake and euthanasia rates are up and owner reclaim rates are down for the first half of the following year. If the trend presented continues, the intake and euthanasia rates are on track to double the numbers from the previous year. 4.

History shows that for many pet owners, the fear of being cited or assessed high fines is enough to trigger relinquishment or abandonment of pets. No actual citation has to occur. This is critically important to keep in mind when considering this bill, because AB 1634 creates millions of new citable offenders simply because they own intact dogs and cats. Because AB 1634 is both punitive in nature and revolutionary in scope, it has the potential to cost the state of California up to \$34 million more than the Hayden Act does today. If even 0.5% of this huge pool of approximately 6 million dogs and cats are abandoned or relinquished by their owners as a result of a citation or fear of citation, euthanasia rates will soar and the economic consequences to California from AB 1634 due to requirements mandated by the Hayden Act will be staggering.

As referenced earlier, the punitive nature of this bill will cause licensing rates to drop, something that will lower revenues to local animal control agencies.

The language about complaints that appears in the bill makes mere allegations actionable offenses. A disgruntled neighbor who dislikes his neighbor or simply doesn't like animals could file a complaint resulting in a pet owner being cited and fined for owning an intact pet, without the original complaint ever being substantiated or cited. This will lead to increased enforcement costs for local governments as they respond to complaints.

In closing, it appears to us that the only thing this bill will accomplish is to make the keeping of an intact pet an actionable offense, thereby creating a citable pool of owners of nearly 6 million dogs and cats. There is strong evidence to predict that it will increase shelter hold times and euthanasia rates in the state, diminish licensing compliance rates, increase enforcement costs due to complaints and cost the state of California somewhere between \$1 million and \$25 million.

Please vote no on this misguided bill.

Sincerely,



Patti Strand, Chairman and National Director

Footnotes:

1. LAO Report on the Animal Adoption Mandate
2. Data analysis and graph prepared by Angie Niles showing projected costs of AB 1634 due to increased owner abandonment and euthanasia caused from passage of AB 1634. Sources include, American Pet Product Manufacturers, California Department of Health Services, Veterinary Public Health Section, NAIA Shelter Project and "Characteristics of Shelter-Relinquished Animals and Their Owners Compared With Animals and Their Owners in U.S. Pet-Ownning Households," John C. New Jr.
3. Shelter data reported at http://www.sheltertrak.com/stat_laas002.php
4. Shelter data was obtained through deposition in lawsuit against the city of Louisville, Kentucky, Jefferson County and the Metro Government