

Mandatory Altering Laws – Devil in a Pretty Dress

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“Spay/neuter all animals and the number of unwanted pets will drop.” Legislate and it will happen: sounds good on the surface. The reality is many of these laws are designed to reduce the ability of people to own pets. Mandatory altering laws look like a way to curb the number of unwanted pets, but will they. The simple answer is “No.”

The cause of unwanted animals is the human owning the critter. Owners who fail to be responsible owners, acquire the wrong match for their life, give up an animal when they move, get married, have a child, do not want the work/cost of a pet, ignore no pet policies, etc., are major causes of unwanted pets. Animal Rights (AR) groups do not give accurate surrender or euthanasia stats based on species, age, whether or not the animal was spayed/neutered, reason for turn in, was the animal found as a stray, etc. When stating data for number of animals in shelters, AR groups never mention that various shelters now import animals from other states or even countries such as the “Sato” program and “Puppies Across America” being done by a private shelter in Salem, MA. Some areas have such successful education and incentive programs that they have open shelter space! Mandatory altering laws will not target puppy millers or pet shops importing poor quality animals over state lines for retail sale. Instead, these laws target all others regardless of the reason for breeding.

Mandatory altering laws could cause people to relinquish animals. Many lower or fixed income owners do not alter pets because of the cost of the surgery. Many public shelters cannot afford to alter adoptable pets, mandatory altering laws could cause them to euthanize otherwise adoptable pets.

Mandatory altering has proven ineffective in communities such as Los Angeles where since 2000; their "Spay or Pay" law has created a sharp decline in animal licensing. Similar failures have been seen in Capitola, CA, Fort Worth, TX, King County, WA, Camden Co, NJ, Aurora, CO, and Pinellas, FL, just to name a few (<http://network.bestfriends.org/>). Montgomery Co, MD repealed their mandatory altering law. Mandatory alter may cause some people to stop seeking medical care, including vaccines, for their pets for fear of being reported for having an intact animal.

Instead of force, create INCENTIVES to altering pets and EDUCATE the public. A few ideas to consider are making the surgery tax deductible, vouchers for food/gas/commuting, vouchers for low-income owners for the surgery, increase the accessibility of low cost altering clinics, education regarding the benefits of altering animals, assist rescues with altering animals prior to placement or who are working to alter feral cat colonies. Who needs targeting are pet shops and pet brokers, (this may help curb the retail sale of pets and impulse buys) as well as owners who repeatedly allow intact animals to roam at large.

It is time to educate as opposed to legislate; provide incentives and assistance as opposed to force.