



- [Home](#)
- [About ACS](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Adoptions](#)
- [News & Events](#)
- [Programs & Services](#)
- [Animal Information](#)
- [Donate](#)

[Home](#) > [About ACS](#) > Legislation FAQ

[email page](#)

[print page](#)

- [ACS on CAN-TV](#)
- [CASA News](#)
- [Employment Opportunities](#)
- [Fiscal Year Statistics](#)
- [Kid's Corner](#)
- [Legislation FAQ](#)
- [Official Newsletter](#)
- [Policy Statement](#)
- [Links](#)

Legislation FAQ

The Anti-Cruelty Society has been committed to caring for animals since 1899. Our focus is-and always has been-on helping animals and the people who care for them. So when the City Council of Chicago proposed a mandatory spay/neuter ordinance (click here for the link to the legislation), we studied it carefully with an eye toward what is best for the animals. Ultimately, we felt the legislation as written would not benefit the dogs and cats to which we are dedicated, and we have made the decision not to support it. This does not mean we do not believe in the importance of spaying and neutering. Our history proves we do. But we do not believe this proposed legislation is the best way to approach-and

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solve-the overpopulation problem that animals face.

Making a decision on complex issues can lead to questions, and we would like to take this opportunity to address those most frequently asked.

Does The Anti-Cruelty Society support the proposed mandatory spay/neuter ordinance?

No. Our deep care for animals and for the health of the community is why The Anti-Cruelty Society does not support the proposed mandatory spay/neuter ordinance currently being considered by the City. While we strongly support spay/neuter for pets and provide the service for more than 13,000 cats and dogs each year, we believe the mandate does not address the core problem of dog and cat overpopulation, which stems from irresponsible pet ownership. Every animal adopted from The Anti-Cruelty Society is spayed or neutered before going to its new home. Last year The Anti-Cruelty Society performed over 13,000 spay/neuter procedures.

How can you be against mandating a service you say you advocate for pet owners and for the animals in your care?

We strongly support spay/neuter. We believe a mandatory ordinance does not address the core problem of dog and cat overpopulation, which stems from irresponsible pet ownership. Public education and incentives to spay and neuter pets are the most effective and proven means to reducing the suffering of animals and making a long-term effect by changing people's attitudes and actions.

Won't a mandatory spay/neuter ordinance reduce euthanasia rates?

No, in fact, in some cities where it has been imposed, the euthanasia rate has increased. A mandatory spay/neuter ordinance does not address the irresponsible pet owners. Incentives and public education are the most effective ways to inspire responsible pet care. For example, we opened our spay/neuter clinic in 1995 to provide low or no cost services for pet owners while encouraging participation and responsible pet ownership through community-based programs. We also perform free spay and neuters for feral cats and pit bull-mix dogs. Our euthanasia rate has decreased. As a result, euthanasia rates of pets continue to significantly decline in Chicago.

Haven't other cities successfully implemented spay/neuter programs?

There are cities that have implemented well-intentioned spay/neuter programs, but they have not been effective. For example:

- After a 1991 mandatory spay/neuter ordinance in San Mateo County, Calif., The mandatory ordinance discouraged pet owners from licensing their companion animal and dog licenses declined by 35 percent.
- Fort Worth, Texas ended its mandatory spay/neuter program after a reduction in rabies vaccinations led to an increase in reported rabies cases in that city. The mandatory ordinance discouraged responsible pet owners from taking their companion animals to the veterinarian for regular care, including immunizations for rabies that can kill animals and humans.
- Los Angeles recently passed a mandatory spay/neuter ordinance. In review of the proposal, the City Controller found that the city lacks the strategy, funding and management to effectively enforce the new ordinance and will rely on voluntary compliance.

Won't a mandatory spay/neuter ordinance reduce the stray pet population?

No, because the ordinance is not enforceable and therefore would have very little effect on the stray pet population. It also does not address overpopulation's core problem of irresponsible pet ownership.

Why isn't this ordinance enforceable?

Currently, the resources needed to effectively enforce this ordinance do not exist. If pet owners aren't willing to legally license their pet, which a vast majority are not, then they certainly won't spay or neuter their pet in order to follow the law.

When you say a mandatory spay/neuter ordinance won't combat the central problem of overpopulation due to "irresponsible pet ownership," aren't you referring to owners who wouldn't pay attention to your education outreach in the first place?

Oftentimes pet owners do not adequately care for their animals because they do not have the means to do so, and not because they simply don't care about their animals. Our spay/neuter clinic provides low-cost services for pet owners to encourage participation - \$25 for dogs and \$10

for cats - and no cost services for those unable to afford the low cost - helping us expand our reach to help those who need it most.

Why do some shelters/humane organizations support this legislation? Aren't your organizations similar?

Unlike other shelters, The Anti-Cruelty Society has an open door policy. We accept all animals in need, including those that would be considered unadoptable. In many cases, we have treated dogs and cats with medical or behavior issues until they are adoptable. The program is expensive to run, but we have a very high success rate, nearly 80 percent, helping these hard-to-place animals find a good home and thereby saving lives.

Our programs are designed to address the core problem of dog and cat overpopulation by encouraging responsible pet ownership. A mandatory spay/neuter ordinance would do nothing to address this issue.

Should the city amend the ordinance to apply only to dangerous dogs?

A mandatory spay/neuter ordinance would not be effective in reducing these problems. It is difficult to accurately define what constitutes a "dangerous dog." Additionally, any such dogs deemed "dangerous" may have already produced a litter, rendering the law useless.

Why do veterinarians oppose the ordinance?

The Chicago Veterinary Medical Association and the Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association oppose the ordinance because spay/neuter is a medical decision that needs to be assessed and evaluated by a veterinarian for each individual animal. As individuals responsible for the interest and well-being of the animals in their care, a mandatory medical decision would hinder their ability to act in the best interest of the animal's well-being.

The ordinance would also cause pet owners to avoid regular visits to their veterinarian as a way to circumvent the spay/neuter mandate, preventing pets from receiving rabies and other vaccinations vital to animal and human health.

- [Home](#)
- [About ACS](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Adoptions](#)
- [News & Events](#)
- [Programs & Services](#)

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