



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Maryland Department of Agriculture

Legislative Comment

Date: January 13, 2022

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 191

SHORT TITLE: Department of Agriculture - Spay/Neuter Fund - Extension and Report

MDA POSITION: Support

EXPLANATION:

HB 191 extends the termination date for the Spay/Neuter Fund within the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) by 10 years (from September 30, 2022, to September 30, 2032). By October 1, 2022, MDA must report to the General Assembly on the fund.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Spay and Neuter Grants Program has functioned as a program of MDA since 2014. Beginning in 2015, the program started funding projects that have provided free spay and neuter surgeries for pets of low income families across the state. Over the last 8 years, \$6,119,839.59 has been awarded in grant funding to 218 projects. These funds have been used to spay and neuter almost 85,000 cats and dogs, including almost 34,000 owned cats, over 14,000 owned dogs, and nearly 37,000 feral cats.

The program's target was to address the number of animals being surrendered to shelters across the state and to decrease the number of animals euthanized in shelters. To assess this progress, the program collects data from 30 animal shelters every quarter. Based on the data collected, while overall intakes have only decreased slightly, stray intakes have had a significant decrease. In 2014 there were 42,333 stray animals surrendered to Maryland shelters and the most recent year with complete data had only 26,341, a decrease of 37%. The decrease in stray animals has been steady over the last 7 years at approximately 3% reduction per year with a significant decrease in 2020 (most likely attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Euthanasia rates have decreased at an even more significant rate of approximately 14.5% per year. In 2020 there were 7,063 animals euthanized in Maryland shelters, compared to the 24,435

ethanized in 2014. This represents a total decrease of euthanasia by 71%. While other forms of intakes have stayed approximately the same, the decrease in stray animals being held at shelters has a great impact on animal outcomes. Stray animals need to be held for longer periods of time before they can be placed for adoption, while animals that come in from owner surrenders or transfers from other facilities can, in most cases, be made ready for adoption almost immediately. Also a large number of stray cats that come into shelters are often feral and are not socialized enough to be able to be adopted safely.

Despite the progress of the Spay and Neuter Program, and the various other initiatives by shelters and rescues across the state have made to improve the lives of homeless animals, there is still much work to be done. It is because of this that the department is fully supportive of extending the Spay and Neuter Grants program.

If you have additional questions, please contact Cassie Shirk, Director of Legislation and Governmental Affairs, at cassie.shirk@maryland.gov or 410-841-5886.