

Fix Philly:
Mandatory Microchipping and Intact Animal Registration in Philadelphia
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Companion & Domestic Animal Policy
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April 22, 2020

This policy aims to decrease the number of unwanted animals being born in Philadelphia by encouraging owners to fix their pets via increased license fees, education, and free or low-cost options for vet care including spay/neuter, vaccines, and microchips for those who cannot afford it on their own. It will also educate and provide resources to those who care for community cats, which will be fixed and released in order to help decrease the number of kittens being born outside. Additionally, microchips will be required for all cats and dogs unless it is believed to be a danger to their health. This will allow for a city-wide database with easy access for police departments, partnered shelters and rescues, and partner veterinarians to get animals returned to their owners quickly and allow for better management of licenses.

After implementation, owners will have until the end of the year to comply, with any future licenses requiring proof of microchip and neuter. Annual intact dog licenses are currently \$40, which will be increased to \$50. Fixed dogs are \$16 and will remain that amount, while animals with veterinary exemptions are the same cost. The 50% senior discount will still apply (Philadelphia Dog Licensing Online Service Center [date unknown]). Service and police/military dogs with exemption require an annual license, free of charge. License fees and fines will be charged in addition to the current legislation in which “violators can be cited with a maximum fine of \$300 per violation plus court costs” (PA AG [date unknown]). There is currently no license for cats, but a \$50 annual registration fee will be implemented for those who wish to have an intact cat. Upon seeing a new patient, vets and clinics must ask and/or check if the animal is fixed and scan for a microchip. If it is not, the vet shall report to the enforcing department after educating the owner about the policy. If the owner chooses to microchip at that time, there is no fine and they will pay the cost of the microchip. If the owner chooses to use a different vet, they will be charged \$20 monthly until they comply. Microchip exemptions will only be accepted from vets which the patient has an established relationship with and requires an explanation of

the risks posed to that individual animal. Any unaltered animal brought to ACCT will be microchipped before release and neutered if space allows. Owners with intact animals will be fined \$50 which will be applied to neuter at a partner organization or refunded upon proof of neuter if they utilize a private vet. This fine is charged monthly until they comply or register.

Other than owners and breeders of animals in Philadelphia, the main stakeholders are shelters, rescues, property owners, and taxpayers. Most shelters and rescues, along with community cat caretakers will be supportive of this idea, but it is the implementation of it that could potentially have a negative impact on shelters if people surrender their pets instead of complying or registering. Overall, they should be able to save money and allocate their limited resources more effectively when there are less animals entering the shelter system. Property owners may not want cats near their homes, but the reality is that the community cats are already there and are continuing to reproduce at alarming rates. Taxpayers' main concerns would be where the funding for low-costs clinics is coming from and if they will be paying more for a resource that they possibly will not use. However, many resources are already available for owners and caretakers with limited funds, including free Shelter-Neuter-Return (SNR) at ACCT Philly, Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) at ACCT or partner organizations with donated vouchers, as well as options for owned dogs and cat in the city (Catadelphia 2020b; Catadelphia 2020A). The increased license fees will also assist with the funding of new programs and low-cost options.

There are health benefits for both people and animals when more animals are fixed, but there are also some concerns for animal health. Neutering a dog can decrease aggression towards other animals and people and if more animals are vaccinated for rabies, there will be less of a concern for members of the community. Fixing cat can decrease the transfer of cat scratch fever and toxoplasmosis which can post a risk to humans. Additionally, flea and tick-borne diseases, bartonella, bacterial infections, and parasites could be reduced if animals are receiving

prevention and/or treatment. In terms of animal health, there are very few risks associated with microchipping. The most common is migration which often does not cause any issues, while implantation site reactions including hair loss, infection, and swelling, are far less common (AVMA [date unknown]). Concerns about neutering a cat or dog can include adverse reactions to anesthesia, inflammation, and infection, and over time there can be an increased prevalence of osteosarcoma, hypothyroidism, spay incontinence, and obesity. There are also many benefits for neutering an animal, including reducing or eliminating female reproductive cancer, pyometra, mammary cancer, and testicular cancer (Scott 2020). Additionally, it can reduce the desire to roam, result in a longer lifespan, eliminate complications of pregnancy and birth, and decrease behavioral issues such as spraying, marking, and aggression (Animal League 2018). Less animals being born will also result in less healthy animals being euthanized.

Many professional organizations are against mandatory spay/neuter laws, which was a concern when creating this policy. Only law-abiding owners would be impacted by a mandatory spay/neuter law, rather than the people with unlicensed dogs. The American Kennel Club states that mandatory spay neuter laws are not proven effective, difficult to enforce, and costly, and the Michigan Humane Society CEO believes that it would just make the problem worse (AKC [date unknown]; Pepper 2019). Best Friends Animal Society and the AVMA also have similar opinions. They believe that education, resources for low income families, and research are more effective than blanket mandatory spay/neuter laws (BFAS [date unknown]; AVMA 2019). Fort Worth, Texas only require licenses for non-microchipped animals and a \$50 intact pet permit or attendance at a Responsible Pet Ownership Class (City of Fort Worth, Texas [date unknown]).

Each category of owners has valid concerns that need to be considered when creating this policy and is the reason that this policy moved beyond mandatory spay/neuters. People are less likely to comply when new policies are forced on them that restrict their freedom. If an owner

has a medical concern, a temporary or permanent exemption can be provided by a vet. For the time specified, the owner may renew the license at the lower price. Some owners may want to fix their pets but cannot afford to do so. These owners will be educated about free-fix and low-cost resources. There are also special categories of dogs which owners may not want to neuter. Police, military, and service dogs residing or working within the city are exempt if there is a letter from the department identifying the dog's work or a letter from a vet, doctor, or program for a service dog. Another concern is that hunting, agility, or show dogs may have decreased performance if neutered. A letter from a vet or a professional organization is required for exemption. If the letter is from an organization, they must obtain an intact license. If the letter is from a vet, the animal's license must be renewed annually at the lower price.

In this era of social media, there will be people who get mad and people who argue because they are passionate about the policy. That is inevitable no matter how big or small an issue is. Animal rescues and shelters will likely post positive things relating to the policy, while breeders may have negative things to say. However, with education, breeders will realize that the policy was not created to target them. Potential press could include statistics about intake and euthanasia over time to see if the policy is effective and interviews with local individuals relevant to the policy and its impacts (Grigsby 2020; Carolina Tails Magazine 2020). Other press may include and observer forums asking the public for their opinions on the issue and opinion articles written by a member of the media organization (FO 2019; Horowitz 2019).

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