



The Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association (ISVMA) opposes the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance being proposed for the City of Chicago. Although the ordinance's stated goals to reduce the number of unwanted pets and gang activity are laudable, the reality is that it will have no effect on these problems. Instead, it will create some serious public health concerns, cause many animals to be denied necessary health care, and will trample on the personal property rights of conscientious pet owners.

The ISVMA opposes this proposed ordinance for the following reasons: (explanations below)

- The ordinance implies that dog bites will vanish because of a simplistic, and non-scientifically based assumption that only intact animals bite.
- There is no conclusive evidence that mandatory spay/neuter programs work.
- This mandate would discourage pet owners from seeking rabies immunization if they are opposed to neutering/spaying and fear they will be reported. Currently, we struggle to ensure the proper safeguards are in place to protect the public from rabies. Rabies is essentially a 100% fatal disease to humans, dogs and cats.
- There are not enough resources in Chicago to enforce this law in a meaningful way.
- With regard to creating a healthier pet, there are both positive and negative affects accrued from sterilization. It appears that benefits outweigh risks; however, there are many breed and individual dog variants, suggesting that professional judgment is required to determine whether and when to neuter/spay pets.

Unfortunately, evidence used to support several of the arguments in the ordinance has been taken out of context and used to mislead. The statement that "...a 1991 study of medically attended dog bites concluded that sexually intact dogs are 2.6 times more likely to bite than neutered dogs..." is one example. We believe the article the ordinance's authors intended to reference is one available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/dog3.pdf>; it was actually published in 1994. The statistic cited from this paper applies to intact male dogs, not the more general "sexually intact dogs" as described in the background of the ordinance. In fact, the authors of the article acknowledged that spayed female dogs may have a greater tendency to bite than intact female dogs.

The suggestion that dog bite injuries will vanish because of this law builds on a simplistic, inaccurate, and potentially dangerous assumption that only intact animals bite. In fact, a study

performed by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania in 2007 (Journal of Injury Prevention Oct;13(5):348-51), which looked at records of bites incurred by 111 children, yielded the following results:

- Children <6 years old were most commonly bitten in association with resource guarding (44%), whereas older children were most commonly bitten in association with territory guarding (23%).
- Food guarding was the most common circumstance for bites to familiar children (42%) and territory guarding for bites to unfamiliar children (53%).
- Behavioral screening of the 103 dogs examined revealed resource guarding (61%) and discipline measures (59%) as the most common stimuli for aggression.
- Anxiety screens revealed abnormalities in 77% of dogs.
- Potential contributory medical conditions were identified/suspected in 50% of dogs.
- When history before presentation was known, 66% of dogs had never previously bitten a child, and 19% had never bitten any human.
- Most dogs (93%) were neutered, and 66% of owners had taken their dogs to obedience training classes.

The researchers determined that most children were bitten by dogs with no history of biting children. There was a high rate of behavioral abnormalities (aggression and anxiety) in this canine population. Common calming measures (neutering, training) were not routinely effective deterrents. The fact is that dog bite injuries are a complex problem that defies easy answers.

A second example of misrepresentation is found in the following statement: "Neutering male dogs and cats...reduces the risk of prostatic disease...and infection." Although rates of benign prostatic disease and infection may be lower in neutered dogs, the risk of prostatic cancer is actually greater. Furthermore, there are some indications that early-age spay or neuter may increase the risk of bone cancer in large-breed dogs. With regard to creating a healthier pet, there are both positive and negative affects accrued from sterilization. On balance, it appears that benefits outweigh risks (particularly when you look at the percentages associated with the various negatives); however, there are many breed and individual dog variations, suggesting that professional judgment is required to determine whether and when to spay/neuter pets. The concept for mandatory spay/neuter originated with feral dogs and cats that were being managed in colonies, and not euthanized when captured. These animals were not owned by anyone and the goal was to prevent a population explosion. Feral animals do not have the life expectancy of owned pets, therefore the negative health impacts of spay/neuter may be minimized or unrealized. This concept does not and should not be extrapolated to apply to owned pets that are members of families. Their medical decisions should rest with their owners who are educated by their veterinarians as to when these procedures should be performed with minimum risk and maximum benefit for their pet.

It's possible to identify both successes and failures in population control and euthanasia reduction when it comes to mandatory spay/neuter. In general confounding factors make interpretation of euthanasia statistics (when these are even available) extremely difficult and drawing reliable conclusions almost impossible. Proponents of mandatory spay/neuter proposals neglect to mention these factors when promoting their cause.

There are also practical issues associated with this ordinance. There simply are not enough resources in Chicago to enforce this law in a meaningful way. Responsible, properly educated people are already having their pets sterilized when medically prudent. It will have no effect on

gangbangers' compliance which is a major thrust of this legislation. It seems inappropriate that a police officer's time would be devoted to inspecting female dogs for spay scars and checking male dogs for testicles when much more serious offenses are being perpetrated.

The unintended consequences of this proposal are of concern as well. Currently, we struggle to ensure that proper safeguards are in place to protect the public from rabies. Rabies is essentially a 100% fatal disease for humans and dogs. This mandatory law will discourage pet owners from seeking immunization if they are opposed to spaying/neutering and fear they will be reported for not having these surgeries performed. These procedures are not routinely accepted by many cultures and only through contact with veterinarians and education can the perspectives of individuals from such cultures be changed. We are convinced this law will result in a decrease in vaccinations against rabies and owners seeking medical attention for their pets.

You do not hear an overwhelming call for mandatory spay/neuter laws from animal health professionals because many of the proposed benefits simply cannot be substantiated. Mandatory spay/neuter laws have had a mixed result in reducing the number of unwanted pets, placed an undue and unenforceable burden on police and animal control officials, reduced vaccination compliance for rabies, and unintentionally restricted access to healthcare for pets. The idea that mandatory spay/neuter will change a gangbanger's behavior or that dog bite injuries will vanish is absurd. At the end of the day, no progress will be made on gang behavior or pet overpopulation and honest tax payers will be forced to give up yet another right in making health decisions for their pets. This ordinance may seem like a quick-fix for aldermen seeking solutions to challenging problems, but the reality is that it will not fix the problems they are looking to resolve. This ordinance will, however, create a nightmare for those who have to abide by it--veterinarians, police officers, animal control officials, public health providers and honest law-abiding taxpayers. Laws should be designed to solve problems, not create more. The Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association recommends that this proposal be allowed to die and welcomes a chance to help the city and citizens of Chicago and Illinois craft well written, meaningful and thoughtful animal legislation.

Board of Directors  
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