

CONNECTICUT SPAY AND NEUTER Task Force a Study in Irony

**By John Yates
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HARTFORD, Ct – There is a grim irony surrounding Gov. M. Jodi Rell's recent call for a task force to study a mandatory spay and neuter law for Connecticut.

The alleged reason for such a mandate is to cut down on the population of unwanted dogs and cats in animal shelters, and to reduce the necessity for euthanasia of animals that are not adopted.

The irony is that Connecticut animal shelters are begging for dogs to adopt, and in fact are hauling in dogs from as far away as Georgia, Oklahoma and even Puerto Rico to meet the demand, an investigation by The American Sporting Dog Alliance shows. There are not enough unwanted dogs in Connecticut to go around because voluntary spaying and neutering has cut the number of adoptable puppies to a fraction of their former number, research at Tufts University has shown.

Moreover, ASDA has uncovered evidence that pet overpopulation is not the real issue. One of the most vocal leaders in the push to mandate the sterilization of dogs makes no bones about his real goal: the elimination of purebred dogs. This is a major platform of the most extreme animal rights groups, such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

Connecticut Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) Executive Director Fred Acker defended his organization's program of bringing in dogs from other states in a 2004 article reprinted on Petfinder.com.

"People will get the kind of dog they want, even if they have to go to a breeder for it," Acker said. "So why not save a dog from somewhere else, rather than breed another dog."

Acker said that the Connecticut SPCA goes on designer shopping trips to shelters in other states in order to bring the kind of dogs people want back to Connecticut. Popular breeds, such as Labrador retrievers, small breeds and puppies are high on the list because the demand far exceeds the supply in Connecticut, Acker said.

The Connecticut SPCA shelter charges people \$295 to adopt a dog or puppy, which an article in USA Today said effectively places them in the pet store business.

Why aren't there enough unwanted homegrown Connecticut dogs to meet the demand?

A study by the Tufts University says that many people, especially in the northeastern states, are voluntarily spaying and neutering their dogs. This has virtually eliminated unwanted puppies for adoption, and even older dogs of the more popular breeds, the study concluded. Most of the dogs that are not being adopted in the northeastern states are elderly, ill or of an unpopular breed, such as pit bulls.

This vacuum of supply and demand has left a lot of empty kennel runs in Connecticut animal shelters. Rather than close down and claim credit for accomplishing their mission, the shelters are going elsewhere to find dogs to fill the vacancies – and meet the demand.

On a trip to Oklahoma, reported by KFOR News in Oklahoma City, Acker and two other people from Connecticut shelters took 31 dogs from the Oklahoma City shelter, and planned to pick up more dogs from shelters in Bethany and Moore, OK, and also from a group called Pets and People.

"This is going to make a lot of people happy," Acker told KFOR. "The little dogs are few and far in Connecticut. The demand is great so we're just connecting the dots throughout the United States." Acker told the reporter that he planned to make a trip to Oklahoma every month to get a truckload of dogs.

But he'll have to get back from Atlanta, GA, first. Acker's website reported that one trip to Georgia required two vans, and that 20 dogs would be taken from a shelter there.

Another Connecticut animal shelter, the Danbury Animal Welfare Society, reportedly picked up six puppies and an adult dog from the Atlanta shelter. "You've got small dogs and we don't," Acker told KFOR in Oklahoma. "We'll probably have homes for half of them before we get back...Every single small dog goes home with 20 back up applications easily." The Connecticut SPCA website also details a program to "rescue" dogs caught in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf Coast. These dogs also are being used to meet the insatiable demand for adoptable dogs in the Northeast.

USA Today reported that 14,000 stray dogs from the streets of Puerto Rico were adopted in the United States over a seven-year period, and Connecticut got some of them.

In neighboring Massachusetts, the "underpopulation" of unwanted dogs is so severe that one shelter literally is scouring the globe for dogs to sell for adoption. The Northeast Animal Shelter told USA Today that it imports 800 dogs a year from the South and 200 from Puerto Rico. This shelter goes as far as Taiwan and Mainland China to come up with enough dogs to meet the demand.

The situation is similar on Long Island, NY, which reportedly brings in dogs from several distant states, and then hauls them to Connecticut for adoption in special vans.

The Massachusetts, New York and Connecticut groups participate in two networks to import dogs from elsewhere. The first is called the "Puppies Across America Program," which focuses on southern and midwestern states. The second is called "Save a Sato," which brings in stray dogs from Puerto Rico. Sato is the Spanish word for a stray dog.

A similar situation exists across the continent in California, which also is considering mandatory spay and neuter legislation. A reported 10,000 dogs a year are brought to California from Mexico to meet the demand that animal shelters in that state can't fulfill.

Data from the California Veterinary Public Health Section of the state Health Department shows that there has been a 43-percent decline in the number of dogs euthanized in animal shelters over five years, and a 75-percent decline since the mid-1970's. Connecticut does not publish similar data.

The American Sporting Dog Alliance is a grassroots organization to protect the rights of owners and professionals who work with breeds of dogs that are used for hunting. You can learn more about us on the web at www.americansportingdogalliance.org