



THE CAT FANCIERS' ASSOCIATION, INC.

World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats

## **“The Price is NOT Right !” California AB 1634**

AB 1634 was introduced in February 2007 by Assembly Member Lloyd Levine and tagged the “California Healthy Pets Act”. This mandatory spay/neuter bill originated in Los Angeles and has been promoted through a massive Hollywood-style media oriented campaign as a “quick fix” to end the euthanasia of cats and dogs in shelters as well as a way to save big money for the State. Even Bob Barker was mobilized to lobby for AB 1634 the night the bill was voted on the Assembly floor barely passing by one vote.

The bill would prohibit all pet owners from owning or possessing a cat or dog not sterilized by 6 months of age. Supporters say only “irresponsible” people would be forced to spay or neuter since breeders of pedigreed cats and purebred dogs are “exempted” and can buy an “intact permit”. Unfortunately, this is not the full story. The issues are complex considering the different cat or dog populations such as owned cats, the unowned cats, feral cats, the pedigreed cat breeds; purebred dogs; mix-breed dogs, working dogs, service dogs and law enforcement dogs. Conditions in the bill make it impossible for most pet owners to obtain an “intact permit” unless they have a registered pedigreed show animal. Exemption is allowed for those who are a “business”, but this criteria is impossible for breeders who raise cats or dogs in a home setting. This exemption also requires a “breeder’s license”, but jurisdictions may not set up such a license program. No one knows what the cost of an intact permit would be since each of the 536 jurisdictions in the state would set their own fees. Currently trained working dogs would be exempt but no new offspring could replace these dogs in the future.

Now that AB 1634 is ready for hearing in the Senate the information used to promote this bill is coming under more scrutiny. Supporters claim the law is needed because 800,000 to 840,000 “pets are abandoned each year” and that this leads to animal suffering and the death of 400,000, sometimes quoted as 450,000, animals many of whom are healthy and adoptable. It is also claimed that California will save \$250 million, sometimes more than \$300 million, if this bill were to become law. These figures are now revealed to be fabricated and extrapolated from incomplete shelter data sent to the California Department of Health Services since each year only a portion of the shelters in the state consistently report. Santa Cruz County, which passed an intact certificate ordinance in 1995, is presented as the model for AB 1634; but this county has shown higher cat impounds and euthanasia rates than surrounding counties without such a law and Santa Cruz has shown a dramatic increase in shelter budget.

CFA participants care deeply about the numbers of cats, and dogs killed in California shelters no matter what the exact numbers may be. We know euthanasia of cats and dogs has been greatly reduced over the last 15 years while the human population in the state has gone up. The most

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successful communities have achieved their success not through coercion but with innovative programs and collaboration with all animal interest groups. In most shelters approximately 65% of

the animals killed are cats, including thousands of kittens too young to survive without special care and feral cats too unsocial for adoption. CFA encourages trap/neuter/return (TNR) programs for the many homeless cats who are feral and living on the streets. AB 1634 will be costly for cats.

#### **The cost to pet owners:**

- Mandatory spay/neuter by six months of age removes personal options to consider maturity, behavior or long term medical issues when deciding whether or when to alter an owned cat or dog. This is an overriding principal that should not be eroded. No surgery is without risk. CFA is fundamentally opposed to AB 1634 because this mandate interferes with a pet owner's decision regarding sterilization of their own animal.
- Eleven studies show that education has worked since 87% to 95% of owned cats are now sterilized. Approximately 75% of dogs are sterilized. To further increase the numbers of owned cats or dogs sterilized it is necessary to provide low cost or free spay/neuter accessible year round.. Veterinary services in this state are not nearly adequate to meet the need for high volume, free or low cost sterilization.
- The cost to spay a cat by a private veterinarian is about \$200 or more. Many of low income will relinquish cats to shelters because they can not pay a \$500 fine nor find a low cost or free spay/neuter clinic. Others will not take in a stray cat if low cost sterilization is not available.

#### **The cost to communities:**

- There will be substantial expense related to creating and preparing for new ordinances in all 536 California cities and counties. It will cost the State millions for staff time and legal expense, meetings for public input, studies to determine administrative costs and public hearings to establish fees. Each community will have to create some enforcement mechanism, public outreach and new application forms as well as a hearing process. There must be new low cost spay/neuter services established to enable citizens to comply.
- Jurisdictions would need to set up a local breeder license program whether this is needed or not. These laws usually entail home inspections and expensive bureaucratic procedures.
- Supporters say the law will be "complaint driven". But these complaints encourage neighbor squabbles over animal nuisances. Responses divert animal control resources from more important services.
- A person who "possesses" a non-sterilized cat or dog would be fined \$500. Many who fear punishment will choose to ignore a stray pregnant cat instead of taking her in. This will mean more homeless cats and increase the numbers of cats and unweaned kittens in shelters.

#### **The cost to breeders of pedigreed cats:**

The conditions for exemption in order to obtain an "intact permit" cannot be met by most breeders.

- Home breeders are not in "business" and will not meet zoning or other requirements to operate as a "business".

- There is no requirement that the local jurisdiction **MUST** set up a breeder license program. Most would not want or need this bureaucratic scheme when they know it will not reduce the numbers of animals in the shelters and only add to their costs for enforcement.
- Even if a breeder license is available it would be expensive. Breeders would resent the intrusion of government inspectors coming into their homes and bedrooms.
- Many valuable breeding cats are not showable for various reasons. Breeders wait to evaluate kittens for breeding or show potential until they are much more mature. There is no “training” for kittens.
- If a cat were to be able to obtain an "intact permit", and then wins "Cat of the Year" after three years since being shown she would have to be sterilized. When cats are proven to be of high quality by their show achievements they are then especially valuable in a breeding program and should not be spayed/neutered !
- Those who “possess” an out of state cat for showing or breeding would be in non-compliance if they are not the owner – this precludes stud service, lease arrangements or showing of cats in California owned by out of state people.
- The fee for an "intact permit" is unknown but to fund this complicated, bureaucratic nightmare several jurisdictions are already proposing \$150 per cat each year.
- Any jurisdiction is allowed to adopt a **MORE** restrictive spay/neuter “program”. Some may say **ALL** cats must be sterilized – no exceptions. The future for pedigreed cat breeding is very insecure. The genepools of beautiful rare cat breeds would be seriously harmed.

**AB 1634 is a loss to the general public:**

- As the cost of breeding cats would skyrocket few people would be able to afford a beautiful Persian, lap-sitting Burmese or high energy Abyssinian as their family pet.
- Those who want pedigreed cats would have to import them from out of state. Internet sales may mean greater expense and lesser quality pets.
- Without new breeders of pedigreed cats the nucleus of cat activities, the cat shows, contributions to health studies, disaster relief, breed rescue, public education and many other benefits provided by the cat fancy will be diminished.

The agenda of many animal rights organizations in support of this bill is to eventually stop all purposeful breeding. AB 1634 would ultimately end one of the most positive forces in California to educate and raise the value of all cats. Yet there would be no impact on reducing shelter cat populations. Alternatives to end the killing of cats in shelters are clearly demonstrated by communities with programs that offer free spay/neuter for feral cats and feral cat assistance programs. This is where the focus must be to dramatically reduce the numbers of cats and kittens in shelters. In addition individuals must be encouraged to take in homeless stray cats. AB 1634 will be detrimental to these important steps to save cats.

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*Fanc-e-Mews*, June 24, 2007

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