

To: The Environment and Transportation Committee
FROM: Sallie Rhodes, President, Beltsville Community Cats, Inc.
Date: March 22, 2021
RE: Testimony on House Bill 146

I am submitting this written testimony on behalf of Beltsville Community Cats, Inc. (BCC) in support of House Bill 146, Spay/Neuter Fund – Extension and Fee on Commercial Feed. This bill, which is sponsored by Delegate Mary Lehman, will be considered by the Maryland State Senate’s Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee on Wednesday March 24th. HB 146 would extend the Department of Agriculture’s Spay/Neuter Fund for an additional 10 years and increase the fee on commercial feed prepared and distributed for consumption by dogs or cats.

Beltsville Community Cats, Inc. is an all-volunteer organization formed in March 2019 as a program of Laurel Cats, Inc. BCC separated from Laurel Cats in July 2020 and became a free-standing, non-profit entity.

- BCC’s mission is to work with residents and businesses to humanely manage and reduce the number of free roaming, "community" cats in Beltsville, MD.
- BCC is committed to promoting the importance of spaying and neutering all cats and to using humane methods such as targeted trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR), rescue, and natural attrition to reduce the risk of unwanted litters and keep free-roamingcats healthier while minimizing the size of community cat colonies.
- As deemed appropriate, BCC volunteers rescue stray, abandoned, and feral kittens that are 8 weeks of age or younger to be placed in foster homes for socialization, vetting and adoption into forever homes.
- BCC volunteers also manage and monitor approximately 170 community cats living in feral colonies on 16 industrial and commercial sites in Beltsville. Volunteers ensure that these cats have appropriate food and fresh water every day while monitoring these colonies for unaltered cats, dumped house cats, and/or sick or injured cats. Unaltered cats are trapped, sterilized, vaccinated and released back to their colonies.

BCC partnered with Laurel Cats in applying to the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) in 2019 for FY 2020 funding and again in 2020 for FY 2021 funding. BCC’s share of the 2020 MDA funding (i.e., \$2,750) was used to spay 33 female cats and neuter 27 male cats. BCC’s share of the grant recently awarded for FY 2021 was \$2,925. BCC is in the process of applying for a MDA grant for FY 2022 as an independent organization.

Why is spaying and neutering cats and dogs so important? Unaltered cats can go into heat four to five days every three weeks during mating season. They yowl and urinate more frequently to advertise for a mate. Fixing female cats reduces these behaviors and lowers the risk of uterine infections (e.g., pyometra) and breast cancer. The fatality rate for these diseases is 50% in dogs and 90% in cats. Spaying a female before her first heat offers the best protection against these diseases.

Neutering male cats lowers their chances of getting prostate/testicular cancers, helps decrease volatility and aggression, and reduces the urge to roam in search of a mate. Unneutered male cats spray strong-smelling urine to “mark their territory.” The bottom line is that spaying and neutering cats improves their temperament and keeps them healthier, increasing their potential to live longer and healthier lives.

The biggest reason for spaying and neutering community cats is that their population growth is potentially exponential. Let's look at the example of two unaltered cats that mate and produce 4 kittens (2 males and 2 females). Assuming none of the cats is sterilized and they are healthy enough to reproduce, the 2 females and the mother cat each would produce additional litters. The new females would then produce litters, while the original mother cat and her older kittens would continue having litters. It is estimated that this could result in as many as 50+cats in about 16 months' time, when a fourth generation of kittens is born. Based on this theory of exponential growth, the 33 female cats that Beltsville Community Cats spayed using Maryland Department of Agriculture funding in 2020 significantly reduced the growth of the community cat population in Beltsville. Considering how many cat groups benefit from the spay/neuter grants awarded by MDA, the tremendous value inherent in the MDA funding is clearly demonstrated.

Groups like Beltsville Community Cats are committed to seeing that house cats and free-roaming cats have access to spay/neuter surgeries and the benefits associated with sterilization. This benefits the community by reducing the number of unwanted litters while minimizing fighting, spraying, flea/tick infestations and the use of yards and gardens as litter boxes. The benefits to government-run animal shelters include a reduction in the number of cats being taken into the facility, a reduction in the number of cats being euthanized due to a lack of other alternatives, and a reduction in the number of complaints about free-roaming cats.

Beltsville Community Cats, like so many other all-volunteer organizations, does not have any paid staff or established sources of funding. BCC is funded through small grants from the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Prince George's County, and groups like the Petco Foundation, and through donations from private citizens and businesses. The small volunteer staff struggles to keep up with trapping and transporting cats, staying on top of the extensive recordkeeping and reporting required of non-profits and associated with the receipt of grant funds, seeking fundraising activities, recruiting volunteers, responding to requests for assistance, maintaining a foster care network, etc. BCC is so appreciative of the opportunity to apply for spay/neuter funding from the MDA and strongly supports the extension of this funding authority as proposed in HB 146.

If you have any questions about Beltsville Community Cats or how BCC uses the spay/neuter funding available through the MDA, please do not hesitate to call me at 301-802-1274.

Sincerely,
Sallie Rhodes, President



PO Box 942

Beltsville MD 20704

<https://www.beltsvillecats.net>