

March 22, 2021

Senator Paul G. Pinsky, Chair  
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair  
Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee  
2 West  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan and Committee Members:

On behalf of Alley Cat Allies and our more than 34,000 supporters in Maryland, I am writing to urge your support of **HB 146, "Department of Agriculture – Spay/Neuter Fund – Extension and Report."** If enacted into law, **HB 146** would continue the successful Maryland Spay and Neuter Grants Program, which is currently set to expire in 2022, by extending it through 2032. The bill would also require the Department of Agriculture to report on how to improve the fund, including a proposed fee structure that can be implemented over the next five to 10 years to enhance revenue available from the fund. **HB 146** was introduced by Delegate Lehman, passed the House and is now assigned to the Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee.

Alley Cat Allies, based in Bethesda, Maryland, is the only national advocacy organization dedicated to the protection and humane treatment of cats. We have promoted sound and compassionate policies for cats since our founding in 1990.

Sterilization is the linchpin that makes possible the bigger goals of public health, animal welfare, and effective nonlethal control.

The 2020 Annual Report from the Maryland Spay and Neuter Grants Program says that it "appears to be having a significantly positive impact on its targeted metrics of intake and euthanasia," showing steady declines in both categories in Maryland animal shelters since the fund was established.

Without the availability of low-cost spay and neuter services that are made possible with this fund, there will be an increased cost of millions of dollars to Maryland taxpayers for the intake, housing, and killing of animals.

Low-cost spay and neuter programs are effective at increasing the sterilization rate among pet cats in lower-income households. These programs also benefit community cats, also called stray or feral cats, as part of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), whereby unowned, free-roaming cats are trapped, sterilized, vaccinated, eartipped, and returned to their outdoor homes to live and thrive.

**HB 146** will significantly reduce one of the greatest barriers low-income owners face to neutering their pet: cost. A peer-reviewed scientific study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* found that while most pet cats are already neutered, the neuter rate is significantly lower for pet cats living in households earning \$35,000 or less annually.<sup>1</sup> The lower-income owners who were interviewed primarily cited high cost as the reason for not neutering their cats. Providing low-cost or free spay and neuter

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<sup>1</sup> Chu K, Anderson WM, Rieser MY, Population Characteristics and Neuter Status of Cats Living in Households in the United States, *J Am Vet Med Assoc*, 2009; 234: 1023-1030.

services benefits both cats and shelters as research has shown that spaying and neutering reduces the risk that adopted animals will be returned or relinquished to shelters.

There are also a substantial number of stray and community cats who benefit from spay and neuter programs. Sterilizing these cats prevents unchecked breeding, eliminates nuisance behaviors associated with mating, and improves their health.

Increased accessibility of spay and neuter services is a win for citizens, a win for animal shelters, and a win for cats. **For these reasons, we urge you to support HB 146.** Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Becky Robinson".

Becky Robinson  
President and Founder, Alley Cat Allies