



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

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February 15, 2023

To: House Environment and Transportation Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chairman, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Department of Agriculture – Spay/Neuter Fund - HB 365 – Support

Chair Barve, Vice - Chair Stein, members of the Environment and Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chairman of Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across the State of Maryland, I respectfully ask that the House Environment & Transportation Committee vote favorably for Department of Agriculture - Spay/Neuter Fund - HB 365.

The Maryland Spay and Neuter Fund is a model program that was created to reduce the number of cats and dogs surrendered and euthanized in shelters across Maryland. Using small fees collected from pet food companies doing business in Maryland, the program provides competitive grants to local governments and non-profit animal welfare organizations for free spay and neuter services for dogs and cats owned by low-income residents and for colonies of feral cats.

The first of its kind in the nation, the Maryland Spay/Neuter Fund has been a hugely successful program. As of June 30, 2022, the program has funded 216 projects that provided 95,558 spay and neuter surgeries for dogs and cats of low-income families and community cat programs. Several states, including Delaware, have passed legislation to create similar programs. Last year, Maryland passed legislation to extend this program for another ten years.

When the Maryland Spay/Neuter Fund was established in 2013, the small fee paid by pet food companies was not tied to the inflation rate. During those ten years, the prices of most goods and services have increased due to many factors, including inflation. This bill would increase the fees paid by pet food companies to reflect the rate of inflation and thereby ensure that the Maryland Spay/Neuter Fund has adequate funding to continue to offer a wide range of competitive grants to local governments and non-profit animal welfare organizations across the state.

Since using the rate of inflation is a well-established method of adjusting costs over time, this method would keep the program appropriately funded through its scheduled sunset in 2032. The fee increase would be phased in over three years with an exemption for small pet food companies subject to certain circumstances. It would also include routine wellness care for animals who were already being provided with services for free spay/neuter under the guidelines of this program as well as providing additional services for underserved areas. By keeping pace with inflation, we can continue this lifesaving program and its crucial services throughout Maryland.

Thanks to Delegate Lehman for sponsoring HB 365. I urge the committee for a favorable report.