

## House Bill 365

**TO:** Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

**DATE:** February 22, 2023

**FROM:** Caroline A. Griffin, Esquire *ccg*

**RE:** **House Bill 365 – Department of Agriculture – Spay/Neuter Fund**

**POSITION:** Support

Chairman Barve, Vice-Chair Stein, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee. My name is Caroline A. Griffin; I am an attorney and reside in Baltimore City. I am the current chair of the Maryland Spay Neuter Advisory Board. I am also the co-founder of the non-profit Show Your Soft Side, a national anti-cruelty campaign, and currently serve on the Board of the Animal Welfare Institute. I support HB 365 but defer to officials at the Maryland Department of Agriculture for comment regarding proposed amendments to the Spay/Neuter Fund bill. My testimony is limited to the heightened need for funding in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Spay/Neuter Fund has been highly effective in fulfilling its statutory purpose of reducing animal shelter population and the euthanasia of dogs and cats throughout Maryland, having funded approximately 100,000 surgeries since its inception a decade ago. That progress has been undermined, however, by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced veterinary clinics to shut their doors for several months, except for emergencies. A recent study from the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine conservatively estimates that 2.7 million dogs and cats were not neutered during the pandemic and many of those animals have since reproduced, compounding the problem further. *A summary of the study is attached at Exhibit 1.* For the first time in years, the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened progress and shelter intake and euthanasia are rising nationwide. One of the authors of the study, Dr. Simone Guerios, notes:

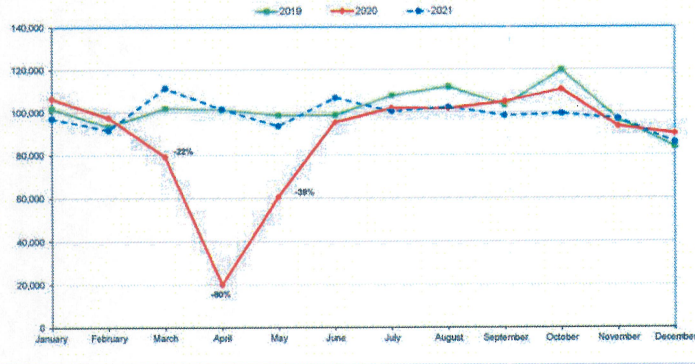
“Currently, shelters are in crisis mode, with over-crowding and lagging adoptions. Pet overpopulation seems to be increasing, leading to increased shelter euthanasia for the first time in many years.”

Despite consistent funding from the Spay/Neuter Fund, the need for spay/neuter surgeries has become so acute in the Baltimore metropolitan area that my non-profit, Show Your Soft Side, started hosting free spay neuter clinics in 2023 to bridge the gap. Community cat caretakers are already facing waiting lists at shelters that are receiving grant funding, even though “kitten season” has not begun in earnest. Moreover, given inflation and the veterinary shortage, clinics are charging \$400 - \$500 for spay/neuter surgeries, which is beyond the reach of many middle-income families, and impossible for lower-income families. The need for Maryland’s Spay/Neuter Fund has never been greater.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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Caroline A. Griffin, Esquire

12 February 2023  
Date



# Decrease in spay-neuter surgeries during pandemic threatens to undermine pet welfare gains



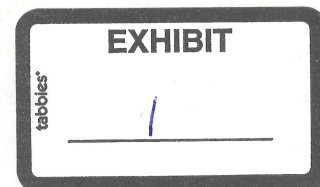
**Julie Levy**  
Fran Marino Endowed Distinguished  
Professor of Shelter Medicine Education...

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September 13, 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic started with a surge in pet adoptions, but it has had another dramatic – and unfortunate – effect on the country’s pets: a huge chunk of missing neutering surgeries. New research finds that there are almost 3 million missing neuter/spay surgeries in the U.S. due to the pandemic, which, combined with veterinarian and staff shortages, is contributing to widespread overcrowding at pet shelters.

The findings come from a study of over 200 clinics from 2019 to 2021 by researchers at the University of Florida. Progress made over decades to control overpopulation of dogs and cats through high-volume spay-neuter surgeries is at risk thanks to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a team of UF researchers conclude in a new study.



The impact — felt both at community shelters and veterinary clinics — includes sharp declines in spay-neuter surgeries after the initial pandemic-triggered lockdowns, followed by staffing shortages in clinics and shelters, overcrowding and lagging pet adoption rates. All of these problems are compounded by a nationwide shortage of veterinarians, which has been felt even more acutely in shelters and spay-neuter clinics, the researchers say in a study published Sept. 13, 2022 in *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*. [Click here to read the full-length paper.](#)

The study focused on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the volume of surgical procedures performed by spay-neuter clinics, said Simone Guerios, D.V.M., Ph.D., a clinical assistant professor of shelter medicine at UF and the study's lead author.

The team drew its research from 212 clinics nationally, all of which make use of the cloud-based clinic management software program Clinic HQ, which is specifically designed for facilities that focus on spay-neuter and preventive health care services.

"The high level of spay-neuter achieved over the past five decades is the single most important driver of reduced pet overpopulation and euthanasia in animal shelters," Guerios said. "The rise in subsidized spay-neuter access helped drive the euthanasia of shelter pets in the United States from an estimated 13.5 million in 1973 to 1.5 million in 2019."

Using 2019 as a baseline, the UF team aimed to determine the impact of the pandemic on the volume of spay-neuter procedures performed in 2020-2021 at the 212 clinics, which collectively performed more than 1 million surgeries per year and were on track to increase surgeries by 5% over the previous year. But in the 24 months from January 2020 through December 2021, 190,818 fewer surgeries were performed at the clinics studied than would be expected had 2019 levels been maintained, the researchers found.

"If a similar pattern was experienced by other spay-neuter programs in the United States, it would suggest there is a deficit of more than 2.7 million spay-neuter surgeries that

animal welfare organizations have yet to address," said co-author Julie Levy, D.V.M., Ph.D., the Fran Marino Endowed Distinguished Professor of Shelter Medicine Education. "And that doesn't even account for the compounding effect of those un-neutered dogs and cats having additional offspring at risk for further reproduction."

All the impacts of the pandemic combined have the potential to undermine progress made in controlling pet populations and euthanasia in shelters, Levy added.

"Currently, shelters are in crisis mode, with overcrowding and lagging adoptions," Guerios said. "Pet overpopulation seems to be increasing, leading to increased shelter euthanasia for the first time in many years."

The UF College of Veterinary Medicine is responding to societal needs by increasing class size and remodeling its surgical training facility to enhance surgical skills development. The college also offers four courses and clerkships specifically designed to provide students with real-world spay-neuter experience, Levy said.

As part of these hands-on learning opportunities, UF veterinary students spay and neuter thousands of cats and dogs in their local communities, she added.

"Through our recent expansion of class size to meet the increasing demand for veterinary graduates, along with unique certificate programs and shelter medicine internships, our college is taking proactive action to address these disturbing trends in animal healthcare and well-being," said Christopher Adin, D.V.M., chair of UF's department of small animal clinical sciences, which oversees the college's shelter medicine program.

Report this

Published by



Julie Levy

Fran Marino Endowed Distinguished Professor of Shelter Medicine Education, University of Florida Shelter Medicine Program  
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A new study coauthored with my colleague Dr. Simone Guerios at **University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine** finds that impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic threaten decades of progress in controlling pet overpopulation and euthanasias through high-volume spay-neuter surgeries performed at shelters and private veterinary clinics. Read the study here: <https://lnkd.in/drQeyW63>

#sheltermedicine