

BENJAMIN BROOKS
Legislative District 10
Baltimore County

Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee

Energy Subcommittee

Chair, Joint Electric Universal
Service Program Workgroup



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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB641
Department of Agriculture – Spay/Neuter Fund

Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
February 16, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of SB641 Department of Agriculture– Spay/Neuter Fund. The purpose of this bill is to modify the Spay/Neuter Fund to allow for additional means for securing funding for animal welfare and improving access to crucial veterinary care.

In 2013, the General Assembly established the Spay/Neuter Fund with the goal of reducing the number euthanasia for dogs and cats surrendered to shelters. This program is financed in full by fees paid by pet food manufacturers who sell their products in Maryland, and since 2014, this Fund has done wonders for the State. Shelter intakes decreased by 27% and shelter euthanasia procedures have decreased by 62%. Moreover, grantees of the Fund’s competitive grants have also completed 106,819 spay and neuter procedures.

The success of the Spay/Neuter Program is clear. However, rising inflation in the past few years has raised the cost of doing spay and neuter procedures. This has especially impacted underserved communities who may not have the money or means to get these treatments for their pets. For example, in 2014, there were 28,710 euthanasia procedures before the Spay/Neuter Fund was widely implemented. That number decreased every year until 2021 when the number of euthanasia procedures jumped by 15% from the previous year. The Legislature must do more to ensure that this fund stays solvent in light of these changing circumstances.

The \$100 fee funding the Spay/Neuter Fund has not been adjusted since 2015 while the costs of doing procedures and paying veterinary clinic staff has drastically increased. Many counties offer low-cost veterinary clinics, but they are not easily accessible to our constituents, thus, defeating the purpose of the Spay/Neuter Fund. SB641 will close these gaps in care and funding. The bill will allow for the Fund’s competitive grant program to consider mobile veterinary clinic services and routine vaccinations during spay/neuter procedures. To pay for these new costs, the bill will allow the Fund to accept voluntary donations and raise the \$100 fee, paid by pet food manufacturers, to \$130 over three years. This increase only applies to those manufacturers with gross income over \$500,000.

SB641 will strengthen the State's capacity to provide essential services for pets through a fair and phased fee increase. The Spay/Neuter Fund has been proven to improve animal welfare. SB641 ensures that this program is equipped to provide equitable access to care.

For these reasons, I am requesting a favorable report on SB641.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin T. Brooks".

Benjamin Brooks