



February 15, 2024

Maryland Senate
Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Maryland Senate Bill 641 – Department of Agriculture – Spay/Neuter Fund

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee:

The American Feed Industry Association (AFIA) is writing to provide information on MD SB 641, the Department of Agriculture - Spay/Neuter Fund.

Based in Arlington, Va., the AFIA is the world's largest organization devoted exclusively to representing the business, legislative and regulatory interests of the U.S. animal food industry and its suppliers. AFIA's members include nearly 650 domestic and international companies, such as livestock feed and pet food manufacturers, integrators, pharmaceutical companies, ingredient suppliers, equipment manufacturers and supply companies that provide other products or services to feed manufacturers.

The AFIA appreciates Maryland's efforts to support access to low-cost spay and neuter services as an effective tool to reduce the number of pet euthanasias. The \$200,000 appropriation from the general fund in 2023 to support the existing spay and neuter grant program administered by the Maryland Department of Agriculture is a demonstration of Maryland's support of this worthy social mission. However, we strongly oppose any action taken by the Maryland Senate that may lead directly or indirectly to an increase in fees collected from pet food manufacturers to expand the program or provide additional services.

Support exploration of alternative funding sources. The AFIA appreciates that the bill proposes a process through which a person may make a voluntary donation to the fund. A citizen-led effort to expand the fund is an appropriate means by which to support services. If expansion of the spay and neuter fund is merited, we encourage the legislature to consider different funding sources and not increase the fees assessed on each brand name or product name of commercial pet food.

Oppose broadening of services. The AFIA opposes using fees on commercial pet food products to broaden the program to pay for wellness care of cats and dogs at the time of a spay or neuter service; pay for operation of a mobile veterinary clinic; or pay for transportation services from unserved areas. Similarly, we oppose the proposed 30% increase in the current fee to pay for these expanded services.

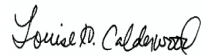
Our Industry. Our Passion. Our Voice.

The proposed addition of these services is creating a welfare program for pets well beyond the initial purpose of the fund, which was intended to reduce animal shelter overpopulation and cat and dog euthanasia rates by financing grants that most efficiently and effectively facilitate and promote spay and neuter services for cats and dogs in the state.

The proposed expansion of services is not an appropriate government function and is best addressed by charitable organizations. Maryland citizens can increase the funds available for spay and neuter procedures and broadened services available to pets owned by low-income families through existing or new charitable resources rather than increasing the burden on businesses that do not contribute to the problem of unwanted pets and are already supporting animal shelters in other ways.

The AFIA cannot support any continuation of the spay and neuter fund beyond the existing fee of \$100 on each brand name or product name of commercial feed and we urge members of the Senate to explore alternative ways to expand and fund the program if that measure is deemed to be necessary.

Sincerely,



Louise Calderwood
Director of Regulatory Affairs