



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

House Bill 85

Department of Agriculture - Spay/Neuter Fund

February 7, 2024

Support

Mr. Chairman, Vice Chair and esteemed colleagues:

I am pleased to present HB 85, which alters the Department of Agriculture's spay/neuter grant fund by increasing the annual fee collected for each pet food product sold in Maryland to \$130; establishing a process for voluntary donations to the fund; allowing the funds to be used for routine vaccinations, mobile spay and neuter clinics, and transporting animals from unserved areas to clinics.

This fund was originally created in 2013 and supports annual grants to county animal shelters and nonprofit organizations that spay and neuter cats and dogs. The purpose of program is to reduce animal shelter overpopulation and euthanasia rates. In 2022, the General Assembly supported the continuance of this program to 2032, but the product fee was left unchanged.

The grant program has been funded by fees placed on commercial pet food products. Due to inflation and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the costs of providing spay and neutering services have risen substantially and have therefore strained the limited funds of the grant. At the same time, the cost of pet food has increased as dramatically as the cost of food for humans.

In 2018, the Department of Agriculture reported 16,376 spay and neutering procedures through this program; and awarded \$892,867.81. Each procedure was funded at \$54.52. Just five years later, in 2023, 14,590 procedures were reported, and awarded \$902,958. The cost of each procedure increased to \$61.89. Costs were rising and fewer animals could be spayed or neutered. The rise in cost and the decrease of animals neutered directly effects the increasing number of animals on our streets and potentially being euthanized at shelters.

HB 85 addresses this issue by requiring the fee, which has been \$100 per product label of commercial feed since October 2015, to be \$130 per label. The adjustment will be phased in over a three-year period.

I am mindful of the impact the increased fee would have on the smallest companies. The bill exempts pet food manufacturers that have an annual gross income of less than \$500,000. That way, smaller businesses are not overly burdened by the higher fee.

Although the Spay and Neuter Fund has resulted in sterilizing of 110,392¹ dogs and cats since 2013, Maryland is still euthanizing a staggering number of animals. According to the Department of Agriculture Spay and Neuter Annual Statistics Reports, Maryland shelters took in 58,041 animals in 2021 and had to euthanize 8,431 (14.5%). Due, in part, to the cessation of spay and neuter surgeries during to the first year of the pandemic, the feral animal population has increased and more animals are ending up in the shelters. In 2022, shelters took in 69,346 animals in 2022 and euthanized 9,151. The trend is moving in the wrong direction. We need to work towards fewer unwanted litters and smaller feral populations.

The program is working. Although the numbers have increased in the last couple of years, this is a huge difference from 2014, the first full year of the program, where 74,433 animals were taken in and 24,435 were euthanized (32.3%).² Between 2014 and 2019, Maryland shelters took in 86,384 dogs and euthanized 37,604 of them; and 333,150 cats and euthanized 90,582. This means *this state put down over 128,000 pets in just a six-year period.*³

We can do better. We must do better. The way to do that is to grow the spay/neuter fund so that we reduce the number of unwanted pets and our euthanization rate.

Thank you and I urge your favorable report.

¹ THIS NUMBER IS RECENT AS OF JUNE 30, 2023 AND IS REPORTED ON THE MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE WEBSITE.

² MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE SPAY AND NEUTER GRANTS PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT, 2014

³ MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE SPAY AND NEUTER GRANTS PROGRAM SURVEY REPORTS, 2014-2019