

California Pet Spay-Neuter Bill Gets Amended

The bill, SB 250, would require spay-neuter surgery for most of the state's dogs and cats.

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California Senate Bill 250, which would require spay or neuter surgery for most of the state's dogs and cats, was amended on the Assembly floor Aug. 31 and is now on its second reading.

SB 250, sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Dean Florez, calls on cat owners to spay or neuter their cats at 6 months of age if the cats are allowed to roam at large. The bill also requires the sterilization of all dogs at 6 months old unless the owner gets an unaltered dog license.

The bill has been amended to require anyone who sells or adopts out an intact dog, regardless of the dog's age, to provide the licensing agency with the name and address of the new owner within 10 days. Any existing unaltered dog's license number and microchip number for the dog must appear on the document transferring ownership of the dog to the new owner.

The bill also now provides that an intact dog with a current intact license will not be required to be sterilized on a first offense: "In any case in which the owner or custodian of a dog with an unaltered dog license is cited for permitting the dog to roam at large, the license of the dog shall not be subject to revocation for a first violation, if at the time the dog roams at large the dog possesses a current license," as specified.

In addition, the amendment provides exemptions "to any owner or breeder of a dog used in the business of shepherding, herding or guarding livestock, or cultivating agricultural products, to any owner or breeder of a dog used for hunting or for the purposes of field trials, or to any owner or trainer of a guide dog, signal dog, service dog, peace officer's dog or firefighter's dog, as defined, provided the dog is licensed, as specified, and the owner or breeder has purchased any required hunting license."

The American Kennel Club and the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council continue to oppose the bill.

The AKC maintains that SB 250 uses sterilization as a punishment for any violation of the animal control ordinance and for failure to license.

"This legislation will not improve the lives of cats and dogs, will negatively impact responsible owners and breeders," according to the AKC. "Additionally, by placing additional burdens on owners of intact animals, this measure may lead to an increase of animals in shelters. Concentrating animal control efforts on dogs whose behavior demonstrates that they are a problem for the community, regardless of their reproductive status, would be a much better use of taxpayer funds."

The organization also takes issue with the specific amendments, such as the first offense rule. The AKC said that two violations may occur years apart and not be a true reflection of a habitually irresponsible owner. For instance, if a dog gets loose one time as a 6-month old puppy and is then accidentally released by a gardener 5 years later, that does not signify a problem animal, according to the AKC.

The bill is currently on the Assembly floor and will probably be voted on in the next few days, although an exact date has not yet been announced. If it passes the Assembly, the bill will return to the Senate where the Senators will vote for or against the changes made in the Assembly.