

Los Angeles Approves Mandatory Spay-Neuter

The L.A. City Council voted 10-1 in favor of requiring sterilization for most dogs and cats ages 4 months and older.

Posted: Feb. 5, 2008, 5 a.m. EST

The Los Angeles City Council voted on Friday, Feb. 1, 2008 to adopt an ordinance that would require pet owners to sterilize their dogs and cats.

The controversial legislation drew a deeply divided crowd of those who spoke for and against the ordinance. After hearing community comments, the council voted 10-1 in favor of the ordinance. The legislation must go through a second reading later this week before it can take effect, but it is expected to pass.

The ordinance would require most dogs and cats ages 4 months and older to undergo sterilization procedures. Exemptions apply for show dogs, service animals, animals of licensed breeders, or those whose veterinarians say the procedure is unsafe. Pets remaining intact would be required to have a microchip implanted.

Supporters of the bill tout it as a way to reduce the number of animals entering shelters where many are then euthanized. Bob Barker, the former host of "The Price is Right," attended the council meeting and spoke in favor of the legislation.

"I think it's obvious to all of us that mandatory spay-neuter is a necessity," Barker said. "For decades, I closed every 'Price is Right' urging owners to help control the pet population... It's not enough. We need legislation."

Opponents of the bill stated the ordinance was a violation of their rights, and said it's a decision that pet owners should make with their veterinarians. The sole dissenting council member, Bill Rosendahl, said 4 months was too young to sterilize an animal. He added that he would rather see the animal services department focus its resources on ensuring dog owners comply with licensing laws.

Those in violation of the ordinance would first be given a warning for non-compliance; future violations would result in fines and community service. A fourth violation could result in a misdemeanor charge.

The council voted to create an advisory committee that would report annually to the council in an effort to gauge its effect.

The legislation is similar to a statewide effort in California to mandate dog and cat sterilization, AB 1634. That measure is pending and is expected to be heard in the spring.