

Committee to Hear Amended AB1634 – the Spay-Neuter Bill

Opponents of the spay-neuter bill are concerned about government intrusion into pet health decisions.

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The California Senate Local Government Committee is scheduled to hear an amended version of California Assembly Bill 1634 today at 8 a.m., but opponents contend the revised bill remains intrusive as both supporters and opponents of the bill attempt to muster support for or against the legislation.

The bill, which would essentially mandate the spaying or neutering of most dogs and cats in the state, was introduced in an effort to reduce the number of unwanted animals abandoned and euthanized in the state.

The amended bill increases the age of mandatory sterilization from 4 months to 6 months, or 9 months with a letter from a licensed veterinarian stating that a specific cat or dog should not be sterilized before 9 months. A second letter from the veterinarian – issued within 30 days of the animal turning 9 months old – could delay the procedure until the animal turned 12 months old.

The previous version of the bill allowed a 75-day waiting period after the 4-month mark for delaying the procedure for health reasons.

The new version also adds a clause stating that veterinarians would not be obligated to enforce the mandatory spay-neuter law, thus would not be required to report noncompliant pet owners to authorities. Despite that, the California Veterinary Medical Association quietly withdrew its support of the legislation in a letter to author Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, according to the San Diego Union Tribune, because its members were divided on the bill's merits.

Among other changes is a provision that would allow, until 2012, local jurisdictions to issue a permit, and charge a permit fee, to allow one male and one female dog per household to remain intact for the purpose of producing a single litter of dogs. This provision does not apply to cat owners.

This provision would be automatically repealed on Jan. 1, 2012, unless future legislation extends it. Local jurisdictions could also decide not to issue any such permits.

In addition, in order for a dog owner to qualify for the "intact" permit, the dog owner must maintain a record of the litter's dispersal and provide it to authorities upon request.

Dog owners would not be allowed to sell or give away any puppies until they were 8 weeks old.

Intact dog owners would also need to provide "sufficient quantity of good and wholesome food and water," the amended legislation states. However, the legislation does not define what is sufficient, good or wholesome.

The amended bill allows pet owners cited for owning intact animals in violation of the act 30 days to comply with the regulations to avoid a \$500 civil penalty.