



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

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## **ANIMAL STERILIZATION**

### **House Bill 4654 (Substitute H-3) First Analysis (5-18-95)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Gerald Law  
Committee: Health Policy**

#### ***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

In Michigan, over 200,000 dogs and cats are euthanized each year in public animal shelters. Many more lost and abandoned animals die from sickness, hunger, or injury. Millions of dollars of private donations and public tax dollars are spent each year in picking up, housing and caring for, and/or euthanizing these animals. With the legalization of ferrets as pets, the problem of homeless animals can only increase. Some people believe that state law should require pet owners to have their animals spayed and neutered.

#### ***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

The bill would amend Public Act 287 of 1969, which regulates pet shops, dog pounds, and animal shelters. Among other provisions and new definitions, the bill would require pet shops to distribute information as to the benefits of sterilization ("alteration") to purchasers of dogs, cats, and ferrets. It also would require animal control shelters and animal protection shelters to contract with those adopting a non-sterilized dog, cat, or ferret to have the animal sterilized within a specified time. The bill would also provide for penalties for noncompliance with the contract. Under the bill, animal breeders would not be subject to the sterilization requirements if they sold or otherwise transferred their own animals and did not act as animal shelters.

**Pet shops.** The bill would impose as a condition for maintaining a license that pet shops distribute, to purchasers of dogs, cats, and ferrets, written information on the pet overpopulation problem and health benefits of pet sterilization.

**Shelters.** Currently, the act regulates "dog pounds" (governmental entities) and "animal shelters" (nonprofit entities). The bill would replace the term "dog pound" with the term "animal control shelter". An animal control shelter would be defined as "a facility operated by a municipality for

the impoundment and care of animals that are found in the streets or at large, animals that are otherwise held due to the violation of a municipal ordinance or state law, or animals that are surrendered to the animal control shelter". The term "animal shelter" would be changed to "animal protection shelter", but would retain the existing definition.

Under the bill, shelters or their designees would be required to contract with any person adopting a non-sterilized animal to have it sterilized. The sterilization would be required within four weeks of the adoption for animals six months of age or older, or four weeks from the date the animal turns six months old. A deposit of \$25 would be collected by the shelter and returned when the person adopting the animal presented a veterinarian's certificate verifying that the animal was sterilized within the prescribed time limit. Failure to comply would result in the loss of the deposit money, which would go to the shelter to finance sterilizations; to educate the public about the benefits of sterilizing dogs, cats and ferrets; and to ensure compliance with the sterilization law. However, an exception to the sterilization requirement would be made for an animal certified by a veterinarian to be at risk of a serious, permanent medical or health problem. In cases where an animal died before it was sterilized, but within the time period specified on the contract for the sterilization procedure, the deposit would be returned upon verification of the animal's death by a veterinarian. A deposit would not be required for dogs transferred to local, state, or federal law enforcement agencies or to organizations or trainers that train guide, leader, hearing, and service dogs.

In addition, shelters would be required to keep annual records of the total number of dogs, cats, ferrets, and other animals received; returned to owners; adopted out; sold or transferred; sterilized and not sterilized; and euthanized. Each of these categories would be broken down as to whether the

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animal was under or above six months of age. A copy of the record would be provided to the Department of Agriculture by March 31 of the following year.

**Penalties.** Shelters violating the animal sterilization provisions of the bill would be subject to revocation of their registration. A person who did not comply with the contract to sterilize a dog, cat, or ferret would be subject to paying liquidated damages of \$250 or actual attorney fees, whichever is greater, for breach of contract. In addition, the person would be subject to a delinquent fee of between \$100 and \$300. Failure to comply with the contract requirements under the bill would, at a court's discretion, result in having the animal returned to the original shelter or to a veterinarian or other shelter, where the animal would be euthanized or adopted out to a person willing to have it sterilized.

The bill would authorize animal protection shelters to enlist the aid of the local law enforcement agency or animal control agency in enforcing terms of contracts. Under the bill, law enforcement agents, animal control officers, or the director of the Department of Agriculture would be able to issue appearance tickets for misdemeanor violations of the bill. They also would be able to obtain injunctions against those violating the act, and obtain declaratory judgments that a particular act, method, or practice was in violation of the act.

MCL 287.331 et al.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

According to animal shelter advocates, twenty other states have adopted laws requiring mandatory sterilization of dogs and cats adopted from public and private animal shelters (Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, and Virginia). A few states even subsidize the surgeries. In all the states, non-compliance results in forfeiture of a deposit. Twelve of the states also make non-compliance a violation of law.

### **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The House Fiscal Agency reports that the bill would have no fiscal impact on the state. (5-3-95)

### **ARGUMENTS:**

#### **For:**

More than 70,000 puppies and kittens are born every day in the United States, yet only one in five will be cared for the duration of its lifetime. A female dog and her offspring can be the source of 67,000 puppies over six years; a cat and her offspring can bring 420,000 other cats into the world in just seven years. Uncared for animals not only are at risk for death and injury to themselves, but also pose health risks to humans through animal bites and scratches and the spread of rabies. Passage of this bill would not eliminate unwanted animals, but it would be a major first step in reducing the numbers of unwanted or uncared for animals.

#### **For:**

Mandatory sterilization of dogs, cats, and ferrets adopted from animal control and protection shelters, along with the resulting fees for non-compliance, will go a long way in increasing responsibility for pets adopted from these shelters. For instance, a person investing only \$5 or \$10 for an animal from a shelter may not seek necessary medical attention for a sick dog when they can get another dog for \$5. With the bill in place, those adopting animals from the shelters will be much more committed to seeing that the animal gets proper food, shelter, and medical attention.

#### **Against:**

Some people are concerned that veterinarians may raise fees for sterilization procedures if there is mandatory sterilization for dogs, cats, and ferrets adopted from animal control or protection shelters.

#### **Response:**

Sterilization is a one-time procedure. Veterinarians usually build their practices around preventive procedures such as rabies and distemper vaccines, heartworm testing, and treating illnesses. They want and cultivate repeat customers. A veterinarian charging outrageous fees for sterilization procedures would be hard-pressed to entice pet owners to come back for a rabies shot.

#### **Against:**

A deposit, coupled with possible fines totalling hundreds of dollars, plus the cost of the sterilization procedure, would be a deterrent for adopting dogs, cats, and ferrets from animal control or protection shelters.

***Response:***

Twenty other states already have similar legislation, and have seen no decrease in the number of adoptions from shelters. Michigan's Bay County Animal Control Department has had a very similar program to the one proposed in House Bill 4654 in operation for several years. The department reports a 90 percent compliance rate with the sterilization requirement and has seen an increase in the level of responsibility on the part of people adopting animals.

***POSITIONS:***

The Department of Agriculture supports the bill.  
(5-18-95)

The Bay County Animal Control agency supports the bill. (5-17-95)

The Michigan Veterinary Medical Association supports the bill. (5-17-95)

The Michigan Humane Society supports the bill.  
(5-17-95)