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Opposition to (and alternative ideas for) Citywide Cat Program - from PETA

1 message

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April 18, 2017

Dear Councilmembers,

Reducing the number of homeless cats in Los Angeles is not only desirable but also possible, but it will not be achieved through the widespread abandonment of homeless cats. It can be done by using the Animal Sterilization Fund (ASF) to serve low-income residents of L.A., enforcing the city's existing spay/neuter ordinance, and requiring the humane and responsible care of owned cats, which includes licensing, microchipping, and safe, supervised restraint and containment.

A 2005 analysis of two long-term and well-funded trap-neuter-release (TNR) programs in California and Florida led researchers to conclude that "any population-level effects were minimal." These results were similar to those of a modeling study that found that the abandonment of owned, unwanted cats offset any reductions in original colony numbers, which were "caused by death and adoption."^[1] TNR programs—which would more accurately be termed "trap-neuter-abandon" programs—have been shown repeatedly to result in an *increase* in homeless and abandoned cat populations.

The Citywide Cat Program proposes to divert funds away from the ASF, a fund sensibly established to help indigent dog and cat owners keep their animal companions and to ensure that they have them spayed or neutered—which can truly help prevent animal overpopulation and homelessness. The fund is also intended to subsidize spaying and neutering costs for animals adopted from city shelters, thus keeping city animal adoptions affordable. A [study published in 2009](#) noted that annual family income was the strongest predictor of whether feline companions in the home were sterilized and found that barely half of cats in households with annual family incomes less than \$35,000 had been. It's critical that the ASF remain intact and continue to serve low-income residents of L.A. as it was intended to. **This lifesaving program helps prevent more cats from being abandoned in the first place.**

Please remember that *nothing currently prohibits or prevents someone who is feeding a cat outdoors to get that cat sterilized*, with or without the assistance of the ASF.

Unlike opossums, squirrels, raccoons, and other wild animals who are native to our ecosystem, cats are domesticated animals who depend on humans for food, shelter, and veterinary care. But cat colonies have

extremely detrimental effects on native wildlife. Feeding stations set up for cats attract rats, coyotes, skunks, and raccoons. This increases the risk of disease and parasite transmissions among these species. Many of the city's residents don't want wildlife in their yards or alleyways, so they employ pest-management companies to kill roaming wildlife, often inhumanely. Once trapped, wildlife cannot be relocated—both for humane and legal reasons. PETA recently had to file a lawsuit—which was successful—to stop the wholesale killing of coyotes in Arcadia, who were perceived as a nuisance by many residents and are drawn to urban areas, often by food left outdoors for domestic animals. Cat colonies themselves attract coyotes, for whom they are prey.

Finally, roaming cats terrorize and kill birds and other wildlife who are already struggling with habitat destruction and environmental degradation. Roaming cats account for the majority of cat-caused bird deaths in the U.S.—amounting to **billions of individual animals every single year**, according to study after study.

If the suffering of homeless cats and the steady demise of the wildlife they maim and kill aren't sufficient reasons to scrap the Citywide Cat Program, it's critical that it be revised to include commonsense regulations and restrictions. Measures that could help reduce the suffering of the animals involved and the risks to the public and their animal companions, while protecting the rights of property owners, include the following:

- Limiting the number of cats allowed at any one property
- Requiring feeders to register and regularly (no less than monthly) report statistics, including the numbers and causes of deaths, the numbers of cats found dumped at the sites, etc.
- Requiring that cats be restricted to registered properties for their own safety and to limit the destruction of native wildlife
- Requiring regular veterinary care, including parasite prevention and treatment as well as the full scope of veterinarian-recommended **feline vaccinations** (Recently in **Delaware**—where animal shelters refuse admission to cats—three owned cats who were allowed to roam outdoors without supervision contracted the highly contagious feline distemper virus, also called feline panleukopenia. One died, and the other two were so sick that they had to be euthanized. According to the report, "[A]ll had direct or indirect contact with unvaccinated outdoor cats.")
- Requiring feeders to remove all new cats abandoned at a feeding site within 24 hours by taking them to a city animal shelter (Cat feeders have been found **hoarding cats**, and experts agree that feeding large numbers of cats outdoors is often the **first step to indoor animal hoarding**, so this requirement is vital.)
- Limiting feeding times and requiring that food be removed overnight to reduce the attraction of wildlife
- Removing language in the proposed program that allows for the abandonment of cats who are not feral
- Requiring Los Angeles Animal Services (LAAS) to respond to calls and complaints about homeless and stray cats by transporting the animals to a shelter, rather than allowing calls to be referred to private, sometimes all-volunteer groups or encouraging callers to get animals sterilized and then re-abandon them (Free-roaming stray cats must not be dumped at feral cat colonies that have been assigned to a registered feeder.)

These basic elements are glaringly absent from the proposed program. We encourage you to look to Beverly Hills' ordinance, which is [available online](#), for sample wording and additional ideas. Regulations can help protect the animals who are abandoned in the program and help the city evaluate its efficacy—it's critical to assess more than just the number of homeless animals sterilized and abandoned. Determining how many animals have died of illness or injury on the street and the manner of those deaths, how many were eventually adopted and taken indoors, how many suddenly "disappeared," the average life span of animals abandoned in the city program, how many colonies have been the source of complaints and their locations, etc., is essential to evaluating the program as well as whether it's having the intended effect and worth a continued investment.

As written, the Citywide Cat Program would constitute a dereliction of duty. It proposes the widespread abandonment of homeless domestic animals. Implementing the program under the slogan of "No More Homeless Cats and Saving Animals' Lives" may sound nice and make people feel good but will not benefit animals at all. Having fewer homeless cats enter shelters by leaving them on the street to fend for themselves doesn't change their pitiful state—they *remain homeless cats*. They just become *discarded homeless cats*. Make no mistake—although abandoning cats on the street will likely help get LAAS closer to the made-up "90 percent save rate," cats abandoned in the program will suffer and die badly. Most will die young and in gruesome ways. And while the city won't count them in official statistics, **they count as individuals and should be afforded that consideration.**

We urge you to abandon the Citywide Cat Program as it is currently described and instead devise a plan that helps cats and the citizens who care for and about them. PETA stands ready to assist in any way that we can.

Thank you for your consideration and for all your hard work for the residents of L.A.

Sincerely,

Lisa Lange

Senior VP, PETA

[1]Foley P., J.E. Foley, J.K. Levy, and T. Paik. 2005. Analysis of the impact of trap-neuter-return programs on populations of feral cats. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 227: 1775–1781.