



The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.

"World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats"

What Happens When Bad Law is Passed?

In recent years there has been a surge in animal laws. Some municipalities are considering revising their animal ordinances that may be decades old. States in the 2002 legislatures are following the leader and writing their own versions of felony animal cruelty provisions and other laws that legislators believe will reflect the importance that modern society places on its pets.

There is little disagreement over some of these laws and ordinances. For instance, few of even the most strident anti-legislation people will argue the advantages of, or the state's right to require, as a condition of adopting an animal from a public shelter, that the animal be neutered or spayed. Even that seemingly benign piece of legislation, though, can have pitfalls. For example, a **New York** law mandating that dogs and cats be neutered or spayed before release to its new adoptive owners has caused at least one budget-strapped small town to announce that all impounded animals will be euthanized, because, the spokesman said, they cannot afford to perform the sterilization surgery.

States and municipalities sometimes move past the time-honored laws governing animal ownership - laws that protect animals from mistreatment, and that protect the public health and safety from zoonotic disease and injury or extreme nuisance caused by free-roaming animals. When these jurisdictions move into the untested realm of social engineering, there is massive potential for catastrophe. For example, as reported in the last Fanc-e-Mews, initiation of a higher license fee in **Ft Worth, Texas** for pets not neutered or spayed caused a reduction in licenses issued. According to the local Health Department, this also represented a reduction in people seeking rabies vaccinations, which they believe may have contributed to a doubling in cases of rabies (from 45 to 90) in this rabies quarantine area.

Lack of funding for a **New York** law passed last year that would require the licensing and inspection of pet dealers has prompted Governor Pataki to ask for a one-year delay of the scheduled April 1 implementation. Such laws, passed without due consideration for the cost of enforcement, can prove to be a serious boondoggle.

In the past few years we have followed some bad laws and ill-conceived public policy. As reported in the last Fanc-e-mews, some, such as the Ft Worth neuter/spay license differential, are being overturned; still others remain on the books, rarely enforced. CFA continually receives pleas from cat owners who are outraged to find that pet limit laws, cat confinement (the so-called "cat leash laws"), and other restrictive laws have been passed.

Bad law can be challenged in the court system, but at great expense and great time - perhaps \$50,000+ in legal expenses, and time counted in years rather than months. Bad law or policy can occasionally be overturned with a groundswell of public sentiment. The most effective protection from bad animal law, however, is to prevent it before passage by letting lawmakers know your concerns. Contact CFA if you hear of animal legislation proposed in your area.

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To correspond with the CFA Legislative Committee, please email Legislation@CFA.org