



The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.

"World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats"

Changing Laws About Cat Ownership

Not many years ago, cats were accepted by society as free spirit creatures that should not - indeed, could not - be confined or regulated. Perhaps because of the stress of modern life, some people now believe that laws should regulate cats much in the same manner that dogs are regulated. Some people go even further, and suggest that unowned or feral cats should be eliminated, in the erroneous belief that these trap-and-kill programs will protect birds, or as a final solution to what is perceived as nuisance.

The Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) supports reasonable laws that fairly and truly address genuine animal problems in any given jurisdiction. CFA opposes laws that are detrimental to a person's rights to own or care for cats in a responsible manner.

The CFA Legislative Group works with cat owners and cat fanciers at a grassroots level to counter laws that restrict or prohibit the breeding of pedigreed cats, deter the beneficial efforts of many organizations to manage feral cat colonies, or prevent the humane actions of individuals who provide food and minimal care and comfort to unowned cats.

All cat owners should be aware of their local laws involving cat ownership. CFA has long supported the fact that cats are safer if kept indoors, and an indoor-only cat is far less likely to run afoul of those local laws. If a person's pet cat is picked up by animal control, the owner can be subject to often-high penalties, impoundment fees and fines for failure to be in compliance. CFA also favors voluntary identification to safeguard cats who may go outside or in case of disaster.

Laws that unduly restrict the responsible breeding of pedigreed cats will eventually mean that the distinctive and unique cat breeds, which have been home raised, and selectively bred, with predictable appearance, temperament and health, may either be unavailable or difficult to find in the future. Some proposed laws would impose such unrealistically high permit fees and inspection standards that the hobby breeder, motivated by love of the breed rather than profit, would be unable to continue.

Several types of laws typically affect cat ownership.

Some of these laws have been in effect for many years; others are new concepts within the past few years. They include:

- a. **Rabies Vaccination:** Most states require that a cat have a current rabies vaccination, and provide proof of that vaccination upon demand of an animal control agent. With the advent of the 3-year vaccine, some laws are out of date by requiring that the vaccination be administered annually. Recent awareness of "vaccine-associated sarcomas" has led many veterinarians to advise rabies vaccinations only for outdoor cats at risk of exposure.

b. **Nuisance Laws.** Probably the most effective and reasonable of all laws governing cat owners. When properly written and enforced, these laws insure that a person's pet cat or cats do not unduly interfere with another person's rights to enjoyment of his property free from nuisance, such as odor or incessant howling.

c. **Cat Confinement (so-called "Cat Leash Law"):** Some jurisdictions now require that cats be either kept indoors or confined to their owners' property. Unfortunately, these are among the most dangerous to the humane treatment of feral/free-roaming/unowned cats and unrealistic for many other cats.

d. **Licensing:** Cat licensing laws usually surface when a jurisdiction is looking for ways to generate revenue. Based on dog licensing ordinances (the origin of which is in the public health issue of protecting the public from rabies), these ordinances prove expensive to administer, impossible to enforce, and discourage trap, neuter, return (TNR) programs that offer humane care to unowned/free-roaming/feral cats.

e. **Limit Laws:** Some cities impose unfair restrictions on the number of pets a person can keep, rather than enforce the more reasonable and fair nuisance, noise, health and sanitation laws that virtually every city has on its books.

f. **Mandatory sterilization usually accompanied by Breeder Permits or Unaltered Animal Permits:** Perhaps the most intrusive of all laws affecting cat ownership, because enforcement inevitably and unfairly targets conscientious breeders of pedigreed cats and purebred dogs. These laws are based on the flawed premise that cat/dog breeding should be a "privilege" to be granted and regulated by law.

g. **Consumer Protection (Lemon) Laws:** CFA joins the pet industry in support of reasonable laws for animals sold through pet stores; however, most "lemon laws" are unrealistic, and unnecessary when individuals purchase a pet cat/kitten directly from a home breeder. CFA encourages pet owners to exercise due caution before selecting a pet, knowing what to look for and the questions to ask.

h. **Cruelty Laws.** Each and every state has a cruelty law, governing those actions of pet owners and non-owners alike in their treatment of animals. These laws at a minimum provide that animals should not be intentionally tortured, killed or injured, should not be abandoned, and should be provided with the fundamental necessities of food, water and proper shelter.

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