



THE CAT FANCIERS' ASSOCIATION, INC.

World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats

## TEN STEPS TO TAKE When Bad Legislation is Proposed in Your Area

**YOU** can have a voice in laws that affect your lives. You have a right to tell your elected officials of your viewpoint on proposed laws that affect you and your pet. Perhaps the greatest impact you can have is at the local level. City and County officials may be the most receptive to contact from concerned members of the community. This is often the level of government that most directly affects your lives and your pets. Zoning laws can limit your right to own pets. Pet licensing laws can restrict your rights or impose taxes and fees on pet ownership. Local laws may encourage feral cat caretakers or prohibit them. Breeder permits or licensing may restrict your right to obtain the pet of your choice. Your local officials may be working with breed rescue organizations or opposing them.

With over 30,000 cities, towns and counties in the United States; national organizations like The Cat Fanciers' Association and American Kennel Club may be unaware of what is happening in your area. Changes to local laws may not be well-publicized beyond the community. When you hear of proposed laws which may be harmful to pets, please contact the CFA Central Office (732-528-9797), or send an e-mail to [legislation@cfa.org](mailto:legislation@cfa.org) for help. You will be referred to the CFA Legislative Group who can give you guidance in protecting your pets. If the ordinance is found to be detrimental to the interests of cat fanciers, cat clubs, pet ownership or the welfare of any cats, then the following steps should be taken.

1. **Assemble a core group of grass roots people.** These people can include pet owners, cat and dog fanciers, feral cat caretakers, breed rescue groups, clubs, and veterinarians, or any others who might be adversely affected by the proposed ordinance. The CFA Legislative Group can help with contacts for cat fanciers and others in your area.
2. **Obtain background information** a) the current applicable laws/ordinances; b) the proposed ordinance; c) as much historical information as possible (10 years or more) of animal shelter statistics and data, and forward them to the CFA Legislative Group. Often cities and counties have their ordinances, meeting schedules and agenda on their web sites. If you need to call or go in person the contact person would often be the city or county clerk. Be aware that the council agenda may be vague at best. The items listed for discussion are usually by title. They may even have a brief summary but do not contain the full text. You will need a copy of the proposed ordinance itself for that information.
3. **Select one main contact person** as soon as possible within the area to coordinate with the CFA Legislative Group, Regional Director, and other organizations. Ideally, this would be a person with some legislative experience. But at minimum the lead person should have an e-mail address and/or a home fax machine to facilitate transmission of printed material and communications.
4. **Order and compile CFA Legislative materials recommended by the Legislative Group.** There will be a small copying and shipping charge for some items. Much information is available on the CFA web site under "legislation", including pamphlets, guidance statements and other materials on a variety of topics. You may order copies of CFA "CatFacts" folders for delivering to City Council members or County Supervisors with some basic information and pamphlets. You would need to prepare a one sheet

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Main Office:

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To correspond with the CFA Legislative Committee,

please email [legislation@cfa.org](mailto:legislation@cfa.org)

"opposition" statement with objections to this specific ordinance to be inserted with some background data, a letter or other information.

5. ***Schedule one or more meetings*** in the area to bring together all of the interested people or groups. These may include others who oppose this specific law for a variety of reasons. For example, a breeding ban on all pets might impact cat and dog groups, but also rabbit, fancy rats, and other groups. Limit laws on number of pets may impact rescue groups. Restrictions on feeding strays may impact feral cat groups. Think of all of your potential allies. Needs and interests among those groups can vary considerably, so plan a non-threatening, friendly atmosphere where they can be shared and discussed. Look for common ground, which will be the base for any effective lobbying effort. Take brochures that explain the interests of the cat fancy.
6. ***Establish a telephone tree and email list*** so that information can be rapidly disseminated among all of the grass roots members. A telephone tree involves each person writing down (without duplicating other peoples' lists) names of 5 or 10 persons who, in turn will have a list of their own, in order to quickly and efficiently notify people of hearings or important information. Include in this telephone tree not only fanciers, but friends, relatives, pet kitten purchasers – anyone who could be counted upon to attend a hearing or write a letter or call in to a radio talk show. An email list of people helping oppose the law can be as simple as a "cc" on your messages. For larger numbers a Yahoo Groups list specific to this effort can be created quickly and for no cost. Such a list would forward email messages sent to the list to all participants, so a single email can reach dozens of people at once.
7. ***Develop lobbying strategy among the core group with the help of the CFA Legislative Group*** glean as much information as possible about the political climate in the area, and what problems are claimed to be addressed by the proposed legislation. Often the *real* reasons for attempting legislation are not readily apparent beneath the more public rationale. For example, a well publicized dog bite may lead to calls to regulate pets and cats may be caught up in the process. It is important to define the problem and see if the proposed solution meets that goal.
8. ***Prepare for the media.*** Once a good picture of the entire situation is established, CFA can help you obtain media contacts and assist in preparing press releases. The CFA Legislative Group also has printed background material and tips to help you with this important part of the cat fancy's public image. One person who is most knowledgeable about the issue and most articulate, should be the person designated as media spokesperson, and requests for comments or interviews should go to that person. Others of the core group should watch for any newspaper articles, and submit letters to the editor providing accurate information.
9. ***Enlist the general public to participate.*** This may be done with press releases to the media, paid advertising, pamphlets or flyers. A simple one page flyer can be prepared with the key issues and distributed (with permission) at pet stores, veterinary offices, street fairs, cat and dog shows or other public events. Local call in radio shows may have open topic days when you can speak on any issue.
10. ***Hearings are critical.*** Plan to arrive at least one hour early to be assured of a seat and a speaking slot. You should check in advance with the city/county clerk to be sure public testimony will be allowed. Often you will be required to sign up before the meeting to speak, and individuals are often very limited in time (just 2-3 minutes). The CFA Legislative Group can advise and help with stick-on badges, signs, etc. Numbers are vitally important in these hearings, and there should be a sea of people – whether they speak or not – with badges that proclaim your position. Someone should take careful notes (or record the session) so that follow-up letters can be prepared to address all concerns and arguments.

### **Report your victory to the CFA Legislative Group!**

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By George Eigenhauser, CFA Legislative Information Liaison

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