



# THE CAT FANCIERS' ASSOCIATION, INC.

## World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats

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April 3, 2009

Representative Michael W. Tryon  
201-N Stratton Office Building  
Springfield, IL 62706

Re: HB 2703 OPPOSITION

Dear Representative Tyron;

I am writing on behalf of The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.<sup>1</sup> to express our opposition to HB 2703 as amended on March 17, 2009. This bill is a costly expansion of the power of local government. It would create a huge new bureaucracy to solve a problem which does not exist but instead creates new risks for cats and their owners.

The bill would authorize mandatory rabies vaccination of cats. Rabies in cats is nearly non-existent in Illinois. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health there has not been a case of rabies in any cat since 1996. In recent years the only cases of rabies reported in the entire state were among bats. There hasn't been a confirmed case of rabies in any cat or dog in Illinois in this century<sup>2</sup>.

While rabies vaccination may be appropriate for some cats at risk, this is a decision that needs to be made by the cat owner and their veterinarian. Rabies vaccination has been linked to many potentially fatal complications such as fibrosarcoma, an extremely virulent form of cancer in cats. Numerous studies in veterinary journals have documented the health risks associated with rabies vaccination, which has become a substantial problem for cats, cat owners, and the veterinary medical profession. In response to concerns about this health issue of cats, the American Veterinary Medical Association

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<sup>1</sup> *The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc. (CFA) is a non-profit organization founded in 1906. Part of CFA's mission is to enhance the well-being of all cats. CFA participants, who breed and show pedigreed cats, are active in cat health promotion, cat breed rescue, shelter support and other animal related programs throughout the world. CFA is a positive force that has helped to educate the public about proper cat care, spay/neuter and responsible pet ownership. CFA is proud of its self-regulation programs to encourage high standards of care for cats in multi-cat breeding environments. A voluntary "Cattery of Excellence" program and breeder mentoring program are part of ongoing efforts to ensure responsible breeding and good cattery environments.*

<sup>2</sup> *Rabies data broken down by year and species may be found on the Illinois Department of Health Service web site at: <http://www.idph.state.il.us/health/infect/reportdis/rabies.htm>*

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(AVMA), American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP), and Veterinary Cancer Society (VCS) jointly formed the Vaccine-Associated Feline Sarcoma Task Force (VAFSTF) in November 1996. They conducted a three year study and the conclusion stated in part:

"Vaccination is a medical procedure that should be undertaken with the same thoughtful consideration as any other medical procedure in veterinary practice. As with most aspects of medical practice, there are benefits and risks to vaccination. Accordingly, vaccination protocols should be individualized to the patient, with consideration given to the medical importance and zoonotic potential of the infectious agent, the patient's risk of exposure, and germane legal requirements<sup>3</sup>."

Cat owners should make decisions on vaccinations based on risk with veterinary advice and not government mandate. An outdoor cat is at risk for rabies exposure; an indoor cat living in a high rise apartment will probably never see a bat and is not at risk. In some states rabies vaccination for cats is of course very important. In Illinois, where the incidence of rabies doesn't warrant this intrusion, the decision should be left to the owner in consultation with their veterinarian.

There are numerous other problems with HB 2703 as well. This bill would authorize mandatory registration and microchipping of cats with a registration fee. This is little more than a thinly disguised cat licensing proposal and the fees constitute a "cat tax" to penalize the responsible pet owner. Cat licensing has been a failure wherever it has been tried. Fear of fines and penalties may lead to lower reclaimed rates at shelters and increase the number of pets killed by animal control.

The greatest challenge in reducing euthanasia of cats in shelters is to encourage, rather than thwart, the efforts of caring people to accept and help the large numbers of free roaming and unowned cats in every community. These are the cats primarily adding to the surplus kitten/cat numbers in shelters. Cat licensing is counterproductive to trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs. Mandatory licensing often results in individuals who neuter/spay and feed homeless cats to stop their volunteer work out of fear of punishment, fees and fines. Many of the other provisions of this bill are hostile to TNR and feral cat caretakers who would be subject to a patchwork of local restrictions, registration and licensing mandates.

The bill defines "running-at-large" as not restrained by a competent person and off the owner's property. "Competent person" is previously defined as someone at least 16 years of age and capable of controlling the cat or dog. Animal control would be allowed to seize a puppy being walked on a leash on a public sidewalk by a child under 16 years of age, or take a kitten right out of the arms of its juvenile owner!

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<sup>3</sup> For more information about the Vaccine-Associated Feline Sarcoma Task Force visit the American Veterinary Medical Association web site at: <http://www.avma.org:80/vafstf/vafstf01.asp>

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Current economic conditions have made it more difficult for many people to keep their pets. Reasons include owners being unable to afford their pets or keep their pets when relocating or divorcing, pets having behavior or medical problems that owners are not able to deal with, etc. This bill raises costs of cat ownership and creates new barriers for pet lovers to keep and care for their cats.

This bill is a costly and unnecessary expansion of the power of animal control. The State of Illinois needs real solutions, not more bureaucracy. We urge that you withdraw the bill.

Very truly yours,

George J. Eigenhauser, Jr.  
CFA Legislative Coordinator

cc: Pamela DelaBar, CFA President  
Allene Tartaglia, CFA Executive Director