



# THE CAT FANCIERS' ASSOCIATION, INC.

World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats

## LEGISLATIVE ALERT

Issued: April 3, 2009

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### HB 2703 -- Amending the Animal Control Act ILLINOIS

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**BRIEF SUMMATION:** This bill makes a variety of changes to existing Illinois law regarding cats and dogs. By authorizing mandatory rabies vaccination and registration of cats, it would create *de facto* cat licensing. It would authorize restriction of feral cat caretakers and add cats to many provisions of existing law applicable to dogs. It would make it more difficult for pet owners to reclaim pets at shelters.

**CURRENT STATUS:** Action is needed IMMEDIATELY. The bill is moving quickly through the House of Representatives.

**WHAT THIS LEGISLATION WILL MEAN TO YOU:** HB 2703 authorizes mandatory rabies vaccination; registration and microchipping of cats (i.e. a cat tax and cat licensing). The bill allows animal control to seize and impound any cat found off the property of the owner and not under the control of a person over the age of 16 years. It redefines feral cat to eliminate farm cats. HB 2703 would allow animal control to regulate feral cat caretakers and restrict or eliminate trap, neuter, return programs. It requires owners of cats and feral cat caretakers to provide unspecified proof of ownership prior to redeeming a cat at a shelter. Veterinarians must provide Animal Control with any owner information in their possession, including name, address and phone number. It increases costs to reclaim cats at shelters. .

### **SUGGESTED ARGUMENTS AGAINST THIS LEGISLATION:**

\*\* 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.

\*\* While rabies vaccination may be appropriate for some cats at risk, this is a decision that needs to be made by the 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. For most cats in Illinois, especially indoor-only cats, the risk of harm presented by the vaccine is greater than the risk from the disease.

\*\* 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 definition of feral cat would be narrowed to exclude farm cats. The bill authorizes restrictions and registration of feral cat caretakers participating in trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs. Fees and regulations will deter many from initiating TNR programs to stop unchecked reproduction. More cats will die if this bill passes.

\*\* This bill imposes new requirements for identification of pets or feral cats being reclaimed from shelters. This will be nearly impossible for most pet owners and completely unrealistic for feral cat caretakers. On top of other expense to reclaim lost pets this will mean more cats will be left in the shelters.

\*\* The bill would authorize animal control to seize and impound any cat "running-at-large." Any free roaming cat may be impounded. Laws of this type often lead to "round up and kill" initiatives against feral cats, stray cats and even owned cats unfortunate enough to be caught outside for any reason.

\*\* 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!

\*\* Veterinarians must provide Animal Control with any owner information in their possession, including name, address and phone number. Not only does this violate the fundamental privacy rights of pet owners, but such laws discourage people from obtaining proper veterinary care for their pets. The quality of life of all pets in Illinois will suffer if this bill passes.

## **ACTION TO TAKE:**

INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS: Contact the chief sponsor, Representative Michael W. Tryon, to let him know there are problems with the bill and ask him to withdraw it. Call, write, fax, email or visit his office. Contact information is at the end of this alert.

If you live in Illinois, send letters, faxes and emails to your legislators in the General Assembly (your state Senator and state Representative) stating you OPPOSE HB 2703. If possible, please visit your representatives' office and let them know you OPPOSE this bill. Please also call, fax or email the other Senators and Representatives in the Illinois General Assembly. Contact information is at the end of this alert.

Organizations with members in Illinois should contact Representative Tryon and ask he withdraw the bill. Contact as many other members of the Illinois General Assembly as possible and let them know there are problems with this bill.

**PLANNED MEETINGS (if any):** The bill is moving quickly through the House of Representatives. Please act IMMEDIATELY.

**CONTACT LIST:** Contact information for members of the Illinois Senate can be found at: <http://www.ilga.gov/senate/> Contact information for members of the Illinois House of Representatives can be found at: <http://www.ilga.gov/house/>

The chief sponsor, House Member Michael W. Tryon, can be contacted at:

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