

TVMA Position Statement Regarding Mandatory Spay/Neuter (MSN)

The Tennessee Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA) is dedicated to protecting the health and well being of animals within the state of Tennessee and is committed to advancing the science and art of veterinary medicine. With this in mind, TVMA adopts the following position regarding mandatory spay/neuter (MSN) legislation.

Elective gonadectomy (i.e., ovariectomy or "spaying" of females and castration or "neutering" of males) is a medical procedure with documented and specific benefits and risks to a dog or cat. The decision to perform these surgeries (or for that matter, any medical procedure) should be made by the owner of the animal and the attending veterinarian only after a full and thorough discussion of the benefits, risks, and potential complications of these procedures.

It has been well documented in the veterinary medical literature that spaying and neutering have both multiple health and behavioral benefits and risks to the pet. For instance, while pre-pubertal spaying has been shown to decrease the incidence of breast cancer in female dogs, it increases the relative risk of developing an often fatal bone cancer called osteosarcoma. Recent research has suggested a possible connection between spaying and neutering and an increased risk of anterior cruciate ligament rupture in dogs. If proven true, this represents a major problem as estimates are that Americans spent over \$1 billion treating cruciate injuries in dogs in 2003 (the most recent year for which data is available). In male dogs that are neutered, the risk of prostate infection is decreased, while the risk of malignant prostate cancer is increased. Other diseases, such as diabetes, hypothyroidism, obesity, urinary incontinence and various cancers, may be more common in dogs and cats that have been spayed or neutered than in sexually intact dogs and cats.

Others have recognized that mandatory spay/neuter is not a substitute for responsible pet ownership. In fact, elective gonadectomy is not widely practiced in the rest of the world and is even banned in at least one country. Many professional veterinary associations in Europe discourage or even outright prohibit this procedure. In addition, MSN may be unfair to the economically disadvantaged. This group is, as a community, poorly educated about pet population control, often culturally averse to neutering pets, has the least ability to afford this surgery, has little or no access to low cost clinics, particularly in rural areas, and often does not have transportation. Although this community contributes disproportionately to the numbers of animals impounded by animal control agencies, TVMA does not believe it is appropriate or equitable to deprive the economically disadvantaged of their pets and make pet ownership a privilege reserved only for the more affluent who can afford the cost of the surgical procedure. In order to have the desired effect, MSN would require fines, sterilization at the owner's or the public's expense, or confiscation or impoundment, thereby imposing further economic hardship on the group most affected by the financial aspect of pet ownership.

The majority of animals euthanized in most shelters (while exact figures are hard to acquire, estimated to be approximately 60-70 percent) are unowned or unwanted, stray and feral cats. MSN would not impact this population in any way. Many of the dogs euthanized are medium to large mixed breed individuals (many of them pit bull crosses) belonging to irresponsible owners.

Therefore, for these and many other reasons, TVMA:

- Applauds and supports efforts to reduce and eliminate the number of unwanted animals entering humane organizations, animal control facilities and rescue groups.

- Believes that the societal benefit of animal population control outweighs other factors and, therefore, TVMA supports current Tennessee law (*The Tennessee Spay/Neuter Law*, Public Chapter 789) which mandates that all dogs and cats be spayed or castrated prior to adoption or as soon as possible after adoption.
- Urges enforcement of the adoption contract, which specifies spaying or castration be performed, should be actively pursued and enforcement mechanisms and incentives should be determined and implemented.
- Encourages continued efforts to educate the public about the need for responsible pet owners to ensure that their pets are provided medically appropriate and regularly scheduled veterinary care, which in some individuals will include spaying and neutering.
- Recognizes the need to further educate the public regarding the reproductive behavior of dogs and cats and the need for owners to recognize and control sexual behaviors in their pets. For instance, over half of dog owners surveyed did not realize that female dogs usually cycle twice a year. Improved education of pet owners will help ensure that the chances of unwanted litters of puppies and kittens are reduced regardless of the reproductive status of the pets.

Believes that the veterinary services provided to pet dogs and cats, owned by private citizens, should be considered individually and the overwhelming concern should be for their health and well being, with population control being of secondary importance.