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June 12, 2019

Chair Taveras and Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy & Environment
Prince George County Council
14741 Gov. Oden Bowie Drive
County Admin. Room 2027
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

Dear Chair Taveras and Members of the Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy & Environment,

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the nation's largest animal protection organization, understands what a large responsibility it is to create a safe community for residents and to uphold standards of conduct through the enforcement of reasonable laws. We strongly encourage the Council to repeal the County's breed-based ordinances. Instead, the county of Prince George should focus its resources on establishing standards to promote a humane community with breed-neutral dog policy. Additionally, we urge the Council to adopt broader support for effective and humane management of community cats.

The era of breed-specific legislation (BSL) is over – communities are repealing their arbitrary breed-specific regulations after finding they are successfully challenged in Courts, are costly to enforce, a drain on valuable resources, and harmful to families.¹ It is an ineffective policy that has failed everywhere it has been tried, and twenty-one states already prohibit BSL. Experts in policymaking recommend against using breed or any single-factor approach towards community animal management, and research has shown that while singling out a particular type of dog may give an illusion of protection, it does not work.² Agencies typically must rely on visual identification to determine a dog's breed; such characterizations should be considered subjective and are typically inaccurate. Incidents sensationalized in the media often stem from misinformation and create ineffective policies fueled by unsubstantiated literature.³ By prohibiting certain breeds, these policies prevent families who are unable to relocate and unwilling to part from their family dog, from accessing the veterinary and behavioral resources their dog may require.

The HSUS wholeheartedly supports reasonable regulations for all dogs and their owners, as a critical tool in creating safe and humane communities, including provisions for ensuring that dogs who have a history of unsafe behavior toward people are properly and responsibly managed to prevent future incidences. However, using physical breed standards as a proxy for determining whether a dog is dangerous is incredibly flawed. With advances in science and our increasing knowledge about a dog's DNA and the relationship to appearance and behavior, we know that breed is a complex issue that does not neatly translate into collective personality traits or predictive behavior patterns.⁴ The physical appearance of a dog has no basis in determining whether a dog is likely to harm someone. Instead, breed-neutral factors such as an unsocialized and unsupervised dog who has not received regular veterinary care, are significantly more predictive of the likelihood that a dog may be dangerous.

¹ Binkowski, Brooke. (2016). Breed Specific Legislation and Dog Bites. Retrieved from: <https://www.snopes.com/news/2016/10/25/bsl-and-dog-bites/>

² American Veterinary Medical Association. (2001). A Community Approach to Dog Bite Prevention. Retrieved from: <https://www.avma.org/public/Health/Documents/dogbite.pdf>

³ Arnold Arluke, Donald Cleary, Gary Patronek & Janis Bradley (2018) Defaming Rover: Error-Based Latent Rhetoric in the Medical Literature on Dog Bites, *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 21:3, 211-223, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888705.2017.1387550>

⁴ Bekoff, Marc. (2019). Dog Breeds Don't Have Distinct Personalities. *Psychology Today*, Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/animal-emotions/201901/dog-breeds-dont-have-distinct-personalities>



The most effective community safety strategies center around basic laws applied consistently to all dog owners. These laws, such as proper restraint and confinement ordinances, create standardized rules, norms, and expectations in the community and create a safer environment. When these laws are enforced consistently, enforcement agencies are able to positively engage the community through intervention, providing support and information to the vast majority of pet owners who love their pets and take good care of them.

The HSUS would be happy to speak with policy makers in greater detail about this and offer more specific recommendations for breed-neutral laws which give enforcement agencies necessary powers to address dangerous incidents. The best use of limited local resources is an approach which ensures that dog owning residents are aware of standards and have access to the pet care services, information, and resources conducive to meeting them. Everyone wants to live in a safe community, and we should do everything possible to prevent harmful dog-related incidents from occurring. Our resources on dog behavior, dog management and dog ownership are free, and we would welcome the opportunity to partner with the city.

Effective and humane management of community cats is another area where the HSUS recommends upgrades to the county ordinance. The Eartipped Cats provision adopted in 2013 was a positive step forward in supporting community-based efforts to sterilized and thus stabilize the outdoor cat population found throughout the county, yet lacks clarity both in enforcement and compliance. The best policies are those that encourage use of best practices without creating barriers for citizen participation in resolving a community issue. Fully embracing community cat programs that spay/neuter and vaccinate free-roaming cats, including trap-neuter-return and return-to-field, at the county government level will save taxpayer dollars, decrease intake and euthanasia rates at the shelter⁵, decrease nuisance complaints⁶ from the public, and provide public health and safety protections⁷.

Our publication, [Managing Community Cats: A Guide for Municipal Leaders](#)⁸, outlines the efficacy and benefits of non-lethal management for unowned cats. Not only is this approach supported by the public, both the American Public Health Association and [the American Bar Association](#)⁹ encourage communities to adopt TNR as a management practice to control community cats. Return-to-field, in which animal control agencies and shelters sterilize and return healthy outdoor cats that enter their care, is fast becoming standard practice in shelters across the country. Expanding the county's support of community cat programs would benefit the county and its residents and align policy with that of neighboring jurisdictions.

The HSUS welcomes the opportunity to discuss the humane management of community cats in further detail, make specific policy recommendations and provide guidance to both law enforcement and shelter staff on how to effectively implement these programs.

In closing, we'd like to thank the Council for this opportunity to discuss how the Council can make Prince George's County a healthier and safer place for people and animals.

Respectfully,

Emily Hovermale
Maryland State Director
The Humane Society of the United States

⁵ Spehar, D. D., & Wolf, P. J. (2019). Integrated Return-To-Field and Targeted Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return Programs Result in Reductions of Feline Intake and Euthanasia at Six Municipal Animal Shelters. *6*(77). doi:10.3389/fvets.2019.00077

⁶ Fischer, S. M., Quest, C. M., Dubovi, E. J., Davis, R. D., Tucker, S. J., Friary, J. A., . . . Levy, J. K. (2007). Response of feral cats to vaccination at the time of neutering. *J Am Vet Med Assoc*, *230*(1), 52-58. doi:10.2460/javma.230.1.52

⁷ Fischer, S. M., Quest, C. M., Dubovi, E. J., Davis, R. D., Tucker, S. J., Friary, J. A., . . . Levy, J. K. (2007). Response of feral cats to vaccination at the time of neutering. *J Am Vet Med Assoc*, *230*(1), 52-58. doi:10.2460/javma.230.1.52

⁸ Available at <https://www.animalsheltering.org/page/managing-community-cats-guide-municipal-leaders>

⁹ Available at https://www.americanbar.org/groups/tort_trial_insurance_practice/animal_law_hist/2016-2017/annual_house_resolutions_2017_102b/