



The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.
World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats

Why is CFA opposed to cat licensing?

By Joan Miller, CFA Legislative Coordinator

The Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) is an organization dedicated to enhancing the well-being of all cats, both pedigreed and random bred. Cat licensing has been promoted as a way to help cats "find their way home" if lost. It is often seen as a revenue source for animal control agencies and humane societies. And it has even been supported by some as a way to increase the status of cats. CFA supports these objectives; however, we continue to question whether cat licensing is the means to achieve any results that truly benefit cats or provide funding. We are aware of the failure of cat licensing to accomplish the goals put forth. Our opposition is also based on skepticism concerning the motives for cat licensing, which involve identification of owners as well as the cats. Moreover, cat licensing is rejected by CFA because we recognize that this regulation is essentially a "cat tax" unfairly targeted to segments of the public who are most visible – those individuals involved in caring for and helping to gain appreciation for cats - responsible cat owners, breeders/owners of pedigreed cats; unowned/feral cat caregivers.

Millions of cats in America are free-roaming/unwanted /feral with no owners to pay a licensing tax. Providing humane treatment of these cats must be considered a broad based community responsibility. Cat licensing is actually a deterrent to solving this problem that exists in every state. Laws and regulations only discourage individuals who might otherwise take the important step to accept unowned cats in neighborhoods and at doorsteps into their homes and lives. Cat licensing, mandated microchipping, caregiver requirements and other regulations tends to result in unowned cats being ignored. Positive programs to help these cats and stop their reproduction have been proven to be successful.

It is difficult to understand why laws requiring individual licensing of cats are proposed by animal control agencies and humane societies as a mechanism to solve cat population problems. The alleged claims are to: reduce cat euthanasia in shelters, identify cats to facilitate the return of lost cats to owners, identify individuals who own or care for cats, increase public safety and health, generate revenue for animal control, and improve the status of cats in the eyes of the public. CFA is convinced that all of the goals that will actually help cats are better accomplished through other means.

Reduce euthanasia in shelters

Euthanasia of cats and dogs in shelters has dramatically dropped since the late 1980's. Even though exact data has not been validated, rates stated as high as 20 million per year are now claimed to be between 5 to 8 million (per the Humane Society of The United States) or 2.3 to 3.0 million (reported by Tufts University). This accomplishment occurred without a push for cat licensing and other coercive animal laws. As more data and information has been obtained within the last several years to better define the reasons for relinquishment of pets to shelters and the real causes for the high numbers of cats

in some shelters, new understanding is developing. It is now apparent that the major ways in which conditions will be improved are:

- encouraging stronger bonding with cats,
- finding solutions for societal problems affecting pet ownership,
- concentrating on prevention of random and indiscriminate mating of owned cats,
- emphasizing neutering and spaying of unowned/feral cats,
- increasing the numbers of veterinarians willing to sterilize early-age kittens and
- changing/improving shelter services and policies so that euthanasia of adoptable cats will end.

The cat appreciating public is generally willing to do the right thing if only they can be properly educated and assisted. Punitive measures associated with fees and fines, complaint driven laws enforced through neighbor harassment, as well as door to door canvassing and other intrusive methods promoted by aggressive cat licensing laws only lead to community discontent.

Spay/neuter of cats is imperative and most cat owners actually do not want their pets to be unaltered. The current high rate of sterilization of owned cats, according to 5 separate studies, reaches between 79.8% and 86.4% (Purdue University and Santa Clara County surveys) with a few urban areas at 91%. Reasons for owners not having their cats neutered/spayed are mainly cost related or because of young kitten age. When kittens are allowed outdoors the “oops” litters result prior to spaying. When cats, not part of a planned breeding program, are sterilized these pet owners have done their part to help reduce the numbers of homeless cats in shelters.

The concept of cat identification is separate from coercive licensing.

Obviously, cats who are allowed outside by their owners should be visibly identified and, as a further safeguard, microchip identified, in case they are lost. Though CFA strongly encourages individuals to keep their cats indoors at all times, or safely confined when outside, general acceptance of this idea is not yet a reality. More than 50% of cat owners prefer their cats to have some unrestricted outdoor freedom in spite of their knowledge of the dangers. Concerned cat owners, as demonstrated in several community polls, have no objection to voluntary identification of their cats who are allowed to roam outside when the advantages are made clear to them and identification is easy, safe and inexpensive.

Cat owners, however, usually have a negative reaction to coercive identification in the form of cat licensing. This is reflected in the poor compliance rates wherever these laws are instituted. Licensing rates are reported as low as 1% but are higher with aggressive enforcement. (The Fund for Animals, Inc. 1996 License Survey results reported 14% compliance rate for cats.) Often when shelters require adopted cats to be licensed prior to release statistics will jump; however, as subsequent renewals are ignored, expensive door to door canvassing programs and veterinarians mobilized as license tag sellers becomes necessary to even achieve the dismal licensing rates reported in most areas.

When alternatives are offered there is success in identifying cats. Marin Humane Society in California sold for \$1.00 simple ID tags with breakaway collars and gave away thousands in local malls and to school children for 20 years while offering lifetime microchip identification at numerous mobile sites for half the actual cost. Today their return-to-owner rate is one of the highest in the Country. Honolulu requires cat identification of all cats allowed “at large”, but there is no license or fee associated with the

ordinance. A safe collar, ear tag, microchip or “tipped ear” (indicative of a sterilized feral cat) is sufficient. An incentive included in the law is the 9 day holding period for lost identified cats, rather than the usual 48 hour period for strays or other impounded animals. Response from the public has been reported as excellent.

Homeless cats have no owners to pay for license applications

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. Voluntary identification of cats who are unowned/feral, through ear tipping at the time of neutering/spaying, however, is accepted as being integral to successful management of cats in colony situations. 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.

Revenue for animal control

Cat licensing costs tax dollars. Dog licensing compliance in most communities is between 12% to 30% at most. Though dog licensing may serve a useful purpose since all dogs must go outside and could get off a leash or out of a yard to cause nuisance, bite or become lost, cats are able to live totally indoors/confined. Municipalities where cat licensing has been implemented report compliance estimates of only ½ of that for dog licensing and this usually requires door to door canvassing for any enforcement. Cat licensing involves administrative burdens, start up expense, public education, unnecessary costs to the cat owners and onerous enforcement methods.

Cat licensing does not improve community attitudes

Most of the public has a high level of contempt for laws that can not be enforced except by complaint or canvassing. Enforcement action creates fear and sometimes results in cat owners' avoidance of veterinary care or rabies vaccination. In some communities vigorous cat licensing laws expose over one third of the cat owning population to violation of current animal limit laws

Cat license laws primarily affect the most responsible and visible individuals. Often these are breeders of pedigreed cats, those who rescue cats and dedicated caregivers who neuter and spay and look after unowned/feral cats in established colonies or in their backyards. When these efforts are discouraged there is an increase in unchecked reproduction of cats with eventual additional burdens on animal control agencies to handle homeless cats and respond to nuisance complaints.

Government expense and the bureaucratic burdens of cat licensing are detrimental to the well-being of many cats and a deterrent to cat ownership and care-giving in America.

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