

Pet Food Fee Proposed in Washington State

Funds from fee would establish a spay/neuter program for low-income cat and dog owners.

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Washington state legislators have developed a bill that would establish a companion animal spay/neuter assistance program funded by a special fee on pet food.

The Senate Agriculture & Rural Economic Development Committee scheduled a public hearing Jan. 27 in Olympia.

Senate Bill 5329 states tens of thousands of stray and homeless dogs and cats are handled by Washington's animal care and control agencies and other animal welfare organizations each year, costing millions of dollars. The most effective and humane way to reduce the number of animals dying in shelters, according to the bill, is to manage the pet population through a targeted, statewide spay and neuter surgery network.

Such a program, the bill states, should be funded through a fee which is "practical, administratively feasible, and targeted at the class of Washington residents that is most responsible for companion animals and their impact on our communities: owners of cats and dogs,"

If passed, the bill would establish a companion animal spay/neuter program for low-income individuals. The program would also fund the spaying and neutering of feral and free-roaming cats.

The program would be funded by a fee on pet foods distributed in Washington. The \$57.50 per ton fee would be paid by initial distributors or responsible buyers of pet food. Specialty pet food and quantities under 1 ton per reporting period would be exempt from the fee.

The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) issued an alert about the proposed measure in which it calls the fee unprecedented and claims no "tax" is currently imposed in the U.S. on pet food for the purpose of funding programs beyond state feed inspection programs.

PIJAC also states the imposition of the fee would result in "significant increases" in the cost per pound of dog and cat food at retail level.

For more information on Senate Bill 5329, visit the Washington State Legislature website.