

Bob Barker Involved in California Spay/Neuter Controversy

The former TV show host calls a pet owner's group 'foes' of humane treatment.

By Soraya Gutierrez

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Longtime animal rights advocate and retired TV host Bob Barker landed in the center of a debate over mandatory spay/neuter laws after recent comments he made about a dog group against such legislation. Barker denounced Concerned Dog Owners of California in a letter to support the bill's author, Lloyd Levine, D-Van Nuys, in his campaign for the State Senate.

The newly formed dog group has fought Levine's California Healthy Pets Act, AB 1634, every step of the way. The bill passed the California Assembly and is pending a vote in the Senate Local Government Committee. The next hearing will be held within the next two months.

In February, the mayor of Los Angeles signed a similar bill into law. The ordinance requires the sterilization of most cats and dogs 4 months of age and older. Exemptions are made for breeders, or if the animal competes or serves as a rescue or service animal.

Barker's letter states, "A group calling itself Concerned Dog Owners of California has been created for the express purpose of trying to defeat Lloyd in this campaign. These foes of humane treatment of animals have hired a political consultant and are raising hundreds of thousands of dollars to oppose Lloyd in his campaign for the State Senate. We cannot let them succeed."

Cathie Turner, the dog group's executive director, responded in a statement declaring, "CDOC was formed long before Assemblymember Levine even announced his candidacy for the State Senate." Turner adds, "Just one of CDOC's projects is to educate the public about the hazards of too-young mandatory spay/neuter and about better ways of addressing the problem of unwanted pets such as education and low-cost and voluntary spay/neuter at the appropriate age."

Turner's group is made up of individual dog owners across California. The group's belief is that mandatory spay and neuter programs can lead to an increased number of animals being surrendered because their owners can't afford sterilization. As an alternative, members support voluntary programs and responsible dog ownership.

A letter was posted on the dog group's website in response to Barker's remarks. "We are anxiously awaiting the apology from Barker and Levine," it says at the top of the posting. The full text of Barker's letter also was posted on the group's website.

Judie Mancuso, sponsor and campaign director for AB 1634, says an apology is not likely. "Oh, please," she adds. Mancuso says that a lawsuit filed by the organization in late April against the city of Los Angeles seeking to overturn the ordinance won't go far.

"It will just get thrown out like the rest," Mancuso says. "These spay/neuter laws are not new, for goodness sake. The one in Santa Cruz has been around since 1993."

Similar laws exist in Rhode Island, Arizona and Nevada. On May 6, county supervisors in Santa Barbara, Calif., are set to vote on whether to pass a universal spay/neuter ordinance of their own.

"Everything Bob Barker has said about CDOC is right on target," Mancuso says. "CDOC's members and supporters spend their time and effort trying to defeat Assemblymember Levine, since he will carry bills that help animals. As Bob Barker indicated, CDOC formed specifically in response to Levine when he introduced AB 1634. When Levine announced his run for Senate, CDOC immediately began campaigning against him, because they know he will stand up and protect animals."