



**For Immediate Release  
March 20, 2009**

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## **COUNCILMEMBERS CALL FOR REINSTATEMENT OF SPAY/NEUTER VOUCHER PROGRAM AND SAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE WAS “WRONGLY BYPASSED”**

Today, several councilmembers introduced a motion calling for the Los Angeles Animal Services Department (LAAS) to reinstate the Spay and Neuter Voucher Program and questioned why a newly-formed advisory committee was not consulted before the program was temporarily discontinued. The program helps lower-income families afford to alter their pets in compliance with the new mandatory spay/neuter ordinance. Councilmembers Tony Cardenas and Richard Alarcon, co-authors of the ordinance, joined Councilmember Dennis Zine in urging the department to report on other proposed means of eliminating its budget deficit. Councilmembers also want a report on why the Animal Services Spay/Neuter Advisory Committee was not involved or consulted on the cancellation of the voucher program. The Controller was also asked in the motion to do a follow-up audit on the voucher program.

“Although the City faces extreme budget challenges, this decision is an error in fiscal and moral judgment,” said Councilman Dennis P. Zine. “Reductions in preventative services such as spay/neuter programs are shortsighted and will undoubtedly cost more in the long run, both in dollars and in cases of needlessly homeless animals. When compared to the approximate \$200 cost of impounding an animal in a LAAS shelter, the coupon program makes economic sense.”

“Canceling the voucher program was insincere to the community and a step backwards in trying to reach a no-kill policy in this city,” said Cardenas. “The mandatory spay/neuter ordinance was created to drastically reduce the 15,000 animals the department euthanizes every year while at the same time, help families of all backgrounds afford to comply with the new law.”

“In the months since instituting the strongest spay and neuter ordinance in the nation, we’ve seen incredible increases in the number of surgeries performed, and it’s critical that we immediately reinstate the city’s low-cost and free voucher program to help our community members comply with the law,” said Alarcon. “The spay and neuter voucher program is a smart investment in our city that will reduce Animal Service’s costs over the long run and continue to move Los Angeles towards our ultimate goal of being a humane, no-kill city.”

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The motion was also co-presented by Council President Eric Garcetti.

"The spay/neuter voucher program makes it possible for many low income families to care responsibly for their pets. Even with tough times, this is one important program that we should do our best to maintain because it will ultimately help us reduce the higher cost of addressing pet overpopulation," said Council President Garcetti.

On March 10<sup>th</sup>, LAAS halted the issuance of coupons for discounted and free spay/neuter services. The current spay/neuter subsidy program provides \$30 and \$70 coupons and certificates for discounted or free surgeries to help lower-income families comply with the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance that went into effect last October. In a memo announcing the abrupt service cuts, LAAS cited a \$150,000 departmental deficit as the cause.

Councilmembers explained that with a challenging economy and no voucher program, many families may avoid altering their pets and complying with the law. Furthermore, A dog or cat that is not currently spayed or neutered can have six offspring within a matter of two months. With spring and summer right around the corner, Los Angeles could see an alarming increase of strays in its shelters. It costs well over \$100 to house and euthanize one animal. This figure does not include vet care costs.

Additionally, when the spay/neuter ordinance was adopted last fall, the City Council created the Animal Services Spay/Neuter Advisory Committee with the specific task of evaluating the ordinance's impact on low-income residents. The discount and free coupon program falls squarely within the Advisory Committee's purview. The group's preliminary report is due to be released by March 30, 2009.

Zine said the unilateral decision by LAAS to suspend the coupon program wrongly bypassed the Advisory Committee and eliminated any opportunity for public input. Furthermore, the City Council should have the opportunity to review the Advisory Committee's report and weigh the fiscal needs of LAAS within the larger context of the City's budget as a whole.

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**MOTION**

PUBLIC SAFETY

On February 26, 2008 the Spay/Neuter ordinance was signed into effect and became enforceable October 1, 2008. Under this ordinance, all cats and dogs in the city are required to be spayed or neutered after the age of four months, with some specific exemptions allowed. When the ordinance was drafted, the city's focus was in achieving a "no-kill" policy in our animal shelters

The ordinance also established the Animal Services Spay/Neuter Advisory Committee with the specific task of evaluating the ordinance's impact on low-income residents. The group's preliminary report is due to be released by March 30, 2009.

On March 10, 2009, the Los Angeles Department of Animal Services terminated the Spay/Neuter Discount Voucher Program and instructed all rescue groups to return all vouchers to the Department no later than March 13, 2009. As of today, the city does not have a spay/neuter voucher program currently in place.

Over 4,000,000 animals are euthanized in the United States each year with the City of Los Angeles euthanizing over 15,000 dogs and cats. In 2007 the department spent 2 million dollars euthanizing animals. These figures have risen due to the current economic downturn. As a result of the economic downturn, the city has seen a 20% increase in dog/cat intake resulting in over 54,000 animals coming into our city shelters. A dog or cat that is not spayed or neutered can have six offspring within a matter of two months. With summer and spring approaching the city could see an alarming increase of strays in our city shelters

The city cannot afford to see a proliferation of stray animals. We are taking a step backwards in our efforts to see Los Angeles become a "no-kill" city should we discontinue the discount voucher program. It is essential that we provide assistance to the lower income residents. The Spay/Neuter Discount Voucher Program is a key element in creating a no-kill city.

The unilateral decision by LAAS to suspend the coupon program wrongly bypassed the Advisory Committee and eliminated any opportunity for public input. The City Council should have the opportunity to review the Advisory Committee's report and weigh the fiscal needs of LAAS within the larger context of the City's budget as a whole.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Los Angeles Department of Animal services immediately reinstate the Spay/Neuter Voucher and Coupon Program funded through the Animal Spay and Neuter Trust Fund.

I FURTHER MOVE, that the City Council instruct the Department of Animal Services with the assistance of any other pertinent city department to report to the Public Safety Committee on Monday, March 23, 2009 on the status of the Spay/Neuter Voucher Program including the status of the high volume spay and neuter clinics.


I FURTHER MOVE that the City Council instruct the Controller to perform a follow up audit of the 2008 Spay/Neuter Voucher Program with the emphasis on the outreach and effectiveness of the program to reach out to low income residents.

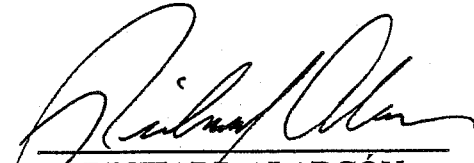
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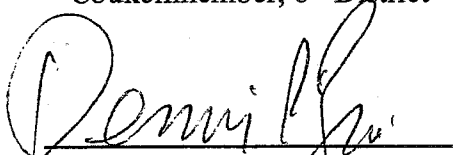
I FURTHER MOVE that the General Manager of the Department of Animal Services take into consideration the preliminary recommendations of the Spay & Neuter Advisory Committee's Preliminary report to the City Council due on March 30, 2009 and consult with the advisory committee members in moving forward with assuring the spay and neuter voucher program is made available to the city's low-income residents and effective strategies are in place for outreach.

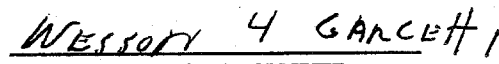
I FURTHER MOVE that the Department of Animal Services report back to the City Council on Tuesday, March 31, 2009 on the requested items.

PRESENTED BY:

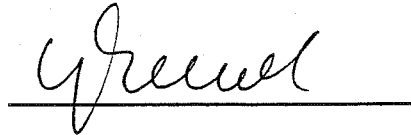
  
TONY CÁRDENAS  
Councilmember, 6<sup>th</sup> District

  
RICHARD ALARCÓN  
Councilmember, 7<sup>th</sup> District

  
DENNIS P. ZINE  
Councilmember, 3<sup>rd</sup> District

  
ERIC GARCETTI  
Councilmember, 13<sup>th</sup> District

SECONDED BY:





## ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON SPAY/NEUTER PROGRAMS

LA Animal Services is not immune to the current economic downturn. The City of Los Angeles is facing a \$500 million deficit. Every department is being asked to consider severe budget cuts – cuts that may amount to as much as 30% before the ongoing Fiscal Year 2010 budget process is over.

The Department started to feel the pain last year when City Council approved a \$200,000 reduction to the spay/neuter coupon and mobile programs in the '08 FY Budget. Then in response to many dire economic forecasts the City Council cut another \$100,000 from this year's programs in December '08. Most recently, the City Council directed the Department to make up a deficit in our Salaries Account understanding this would require further reductions to our spay/neuter funding. The salary deficit is the result of a \$414,000 budget cut that was paid for by a City plan requiring employees to take six mandatory furlough days this fiscal year. However, the mandate was rescinded and the funding was not restored. Instead we are being asked to make up this deficit through our own expense and spay/neuter funds.

The Department has saved over \$100,000 of this shortfall to date. Another \$150,000 has been identified through belt-tightening in our expense accounts. With an alarming increase in the number of dogs and cats entering the City's system in 2008 we need to maintain staffing levels to ensure the health, safety and welfare of animals and people in the City of Los Angeles. Since we cannot afford to lay any employees off and our attrition rate is very low our only recourse is to make up the remaining \$150,000 deficit through another reduction in our spay/neuter coupon and mobile programs.

This being the case, the Department is suspending the distribution of all \$30 discount and \$70 free coupons at this time. We are taking this step because there is a reasonable expectation that the City may cut our spay/neuter funding for some or all of the remaining fiscal year.

Coupons already distributed will be honored. However, to ensure we do not issue coupons for which we may not have funding, we have asked our animal care centers and rescue partners to stop distributing coupons as of March 10, 2009. All unused coupon books must be returned to the Department for auditing purposes. We have notified the Sam Simon Foundation to cease sterilizations that depend on City reimbursement. We will, however, continue to fund The Amanda Foundation's efforts on behalf of the City.

Once we know what the final funding cut is we will be in a position to better assess available revenues and resume distribution of coupons to the extent that we are confident we have funds.

Spay/neuter funding for the next fiscal year is unknown at this time. The Department maximizes every opportunity to express the importance of spay/neuter programs to reduce pet overpopulation and the long term cost of animal services. However, the City is facing a daunting challenge that will undoubtedly result in significant service reductions and even layoffs. As is the case at all levels of government at this time emergency measures must be taken. More than ever before it is important for all of us to pull together as a community to ensure our animals are not left behind.