



**For Immediate Release
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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 10th, 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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