

September 28, 2010

The Honorable Thomas E. Dernoga, Chairman
and
The Prince George's County Council
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Dr., 2nd Floor
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

**Via e-mail: TEDernoga@co.pg.md.us; district2@co.pg.md.us;
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Dear Chairman Dernoga and Council:

I'm writing on behalf of PETA, the world's largest animal rights organization with more than 2 million members and supporters internationally. We hope this finds you well. We have been contacted by concerned Prince George's County-area citizens about a push by a small group of citizens to legislatively legitimize their hobby of feeding feral cats, without regard for the health and welfare of other animals or taxpayers in the community. **We strongly support the current law in Prince George's County, which rightfully cites citizens who fail to properly care and house animals in their custody.** I hope the information herein is helpful to County leaders considering ordinances and policies on the issue of homeless and neglected cats.

Legislatively condoning the proliferation of colonies of homeless cats sends constituents the message that cats can survive and thrive outdoors without veterinary care to prevent and treat parasite infestations and disease, adequate and safe shelter, and protection from cars, other animals, and people who don't want them around. **In reality, nothing could be further from the truth.** Our past experiences with "trap/neuter/release" programs and attempts to manage feral-cat colonies have led us to doubt that these programs are truly in the cats' and/or the communities' best interests. Feral cats are not wildlife; they are domesticated animals who depend on humans for sustenance and care, just as socialized cats do. We receive countless reports of incidents in which cats—"managed" or not—suffer and die horrible deaths because they must fend for themselves outdoors. Having witnessed firsthand the gruesome things that can happen to feral cats, we cannot in good conscience oppose euthanasia as a humane alternative for dealing with overpopulation. Please know that this stance is based solely on what we believe to be the most humane option for these animals.

Although altering feral cats prevents the suffering of future generations, it does very little to improve the quality of life of the cats who are left outdoors. Homeless cats do not die of old age. Highly contagious diseases are common, as are infected puncture wounds, broken bones, painful urinary tract infections, brain damage, internal injuries, attacks by other animals or cruel humans, automobile accidents, and terrible living conditions like freezing or stifling temperatures, scrounging for



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food, and being considered a “nuisance,” through no fault of their own. Moreover, roaming cats terrorize and kill countless birds and other wildlife who are not equipped to deal with such predators.

PETA supports the efforts of animal control agencies when they rescue cats from the streets, even if a quick and painless end is the best that can be offered. We believe that resources are most effectively directed at the source of the tragic animal homelessness crisis—the indiscriminate breeding of dogs and cats. Communities that wish to effectively address animal overpopulation and its attendant public health and safety concerns can make serious headway by implementing ordinances that require citizens to spay and neuter their own animals, forbid the sale and trade of intact animals without a costly permit, and require local animal shelters to remain accessible and user-friendly by accepting all animals at all times without fees or reservations. You can find many sample ordinances [here](#), and I am attaching a couple of articles about the positive effects spay/neuter laws have had in other communities.

I am also attaching a few recent articles about stray cats testing positive for rabies in Maryland. The Prince George’s County Health Department issued a warning in October, 2009 urging Bowie residents to avoid contact with stray animals after a stray cat there tested positive for rabies. Food left out by citizens who insist on feeding feral cats and leaving the animals homeless to fend for themselves attract a variety of other animals, including those who are considered “pests” and are common rabies vector species (raccoons, foxes, etc.). The existence of colonies of cats with a maintained food source also increases the incidence of abandonment of socialized cats at the feeding sites, increasing the number of homeless and unwanted animals running at large within the community. More information about the dangers of TNR can be found in this powerful, short video produced by the American Bird Conservancy: <http://www.youtube.com/abcbirds#p/u/1/-fvN7FNUPas>.

If PETA can be of any assistance by providing sample laws and/or putting you in touch with officials in other cities that have had success with such ordinances, please call me at 443-320-1277 or e-mail me at TeresaC@Peta.org without hesitation. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,



Teresa Lynn Chagrin, Animal Care & Control Specialist
Cruelty Investigations Department

Encls: “Spay-neuter law works in Santa Cruz,” June 9, 2007
“SF sterilization law successful in reducing pit bull population,”
August 28, 2007
“Health officials sound rabies warning in Bowie,” October 8, 2009



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“Cat Tests Positive for Rabies in Ocean City,” July 9, 2010
“Rabid Cat Bites Del. Resident in Md.,” May 4, 2010

cc:

The Honorable Jack B. Johnson, County Executive
Charles Wilson, Director of DER
Donald Shell, MD, MA, Health Officer



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