

# FAQ's

(frequently asked questions)

## Mandatory Spay Neuter (pit bulls or any pet)

### Overview

The proposal recommends the repeal of Section 14.60 of the City Code. Section. 14.60 mandates the spay or neuter of any dog classified as a “pit bull” by 8 weeks of age and outlines the penalties of non-compliance, including impoundment and jail time for a subsequent offense.

Repealing Section 14.60 has no fiscal impact on taxpayers and redirects limited animal control resources to animals exhibiting dangerous behavior and cruelty and neglect; the biggest issues facing Kansas City community.

Proposal to mandate the spay neuter of *all* cats and dogs: Spay and Neuter Kansas City and Kansas City Pet Project strongly oppose this proposal. Mandating all pets to be spayed and neutered penalizes underserved families in the city who cannot afford the surgery for their pets. In fact, this unfairly targets the lowest income residents and increases their economic woes. And, finally, this will have significant negative financial impacts on both organizations, which would severely impact other vital programs in this community.

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### What is spay & neuter?

Spaying and neutering is a surgical procedure that eliminates an animals’ ability to reproduce. Spaying of females involves the removal of the entire reproductive tract (uterus and ovaries). Neutering of males is done by removing the testicles, or alternatively, chemical sterilization rendering the animal unable to reproduce. The term “neuter” can describe both neuter and spay and will be used to define both throughout this document.

#### Isn't spaying & neutering a good thing?

Neutering is a recommended procedure for most pet animals in most circumstances. Both Spay and Neuter Kansas City and Kansas City Pet Project support and promote voluntary neutering policies. Spay and Neuter Kansas City provides low-cost neuter for underserved areas of the city and families in need as a means of animal population control, to lower shelter intake, and for those pets to have healthy lives.

There are many health and behavior benefits to neutering pets that make it a preferred surgery for most pet owners. However, neither organization supports ordinances that mandate such sterilization that contain criminal penalties.



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### Are there any downsides to spay/neuter?

There are health risks with any surgery. The level of risk depends on the specific health, age, and environmental factors unique to each individual animal. Veterinary organizations such as the American Veterinary Medical Association, American College of Theriogenologists, and the Society for Theriogenology all strongly suggest that neuter decisions are best left to the recommendation of veterinarians based on specific needs of the animals and clients.

### Do most people already spay/neuter their pets?

Most people choose to neuter their pets, even without a law mandating it. According to Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) research, 85% of dog owners and nearly 90% of cat owners voluntarily chose to neuter their pets.

### Why do some people choose not to neuter their pets?

According to the PetSmart Charities study, the top reasons why people have chosen not to neuter their pet are: Pet is too young (41%), surgery is too expensive (32%) or haven't gotten around to it (21%).

While HSUS notes that, overall, the percentage of altered pets appears high based on the numbers, as many as 80% of pet owners in "underserved" communities do not get their pets fixed. The study indicates this is due to cost and lack of access to veterinary clinics (resource deserts). Mandatory spay/neuter ordinances do not overcome these barriers and, in fact, high fines for noncompliance only make the situation worse. A family who simply cannot afford to neuter their pet would face a fine (currently up to \$500) and impoundment of the pet (at a cost of \$100).

The impounded pet then incurs fees for every day that it is at Kansas City Pet Project, adding up to \$105 per week (on top of the aforementioned fines and impound fee). For someone who cannot afford a surgery, these fines and fees prevent families from retrieving their pets, thus these pets are separated from a family that loves them, and they become part of the shelter system at Kansas City Pet Project. This is why targeted community outreach, door-to-door canvassing neighborhood events and clinics, and affordable services such as Spay and Neuter Kansas city are important to our community and a far more effective approach than mandatory laws.

### Why was the ordinance targeted at pit bulls?

The law was written in 2006 and targeted pit bulls because of a real or perceived notion that there was an overpopulation of pit bulls in the community. There was also a belief that only "bad people have pit bulls." The targeting toward one breed of dog creates many problems, including the promotion of profiling, discrimination, and subjective breed identification. This ordinance has consistently misdirected city resources, including animal control officer time responding to complaints, issuing citations, confirming surgery schedules, bringing vouchers to Spay and Neuter Kansas City, transporting animals to veterinary clinics, filling out paperwork, extending voucher dates, and impounding animals. These limited resources would best be used in responding to complaints about bites, aggressive/dangerous animals, as well as on cases of animal neglect and cruelty. We believe this is how we'd ensure a safer, more humane community.



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### **Do you know a dog's breed by looking at it?**

In most cases, breed identification is very subjective and often there will be disagreements among veterinarians, animal control, and shelter workers on what breed a dog might be. Particularly given the majority of dogs in the country today are mixed-breed dogs.

A 2013 study conducted by Dr. Victoria Voith of Western University of Health Sciences showed that 65% of dogs observed by participants there was no majority agreement on the breed of dog or predominant breed of dog in a mixed breed dog. The survey was taken by 923 animal welfare professionals at 30 locations across the United States.

Given the subjective nature of breed identification, often owners do not know if their dog is targeted under the law, or sometimes think that they are not targeted based on differences in breed identification between animal welfare professionals.

### **Has the law been effective?**

It has not. Compliance rates are less than 20% and costing Kansas City Animal Health and Safety, KC Pet Project, and Spay and Neuter Kansas City needless expenses that could be better spent toward simple education. There has not been a reduction in the number of pit bull type dogs coming into the shelter since the ordinance was enacted. Nor has there been a reduction in aggressive dog incidents in the community.

### **But, we still hear that that Kansas City Pet Project is always full of pit bulls, right?**

It's true that more than 20% of the dogs that KC Pet Project receives are pit bulls. However, there are many reasons for this, almost none of which are solved by the mandatory spay/neuter law. First of all, pit bulls are popular. A recent study by Banfield Pet Hospital noted that pit bulls were the 5th most common breed of dog they saw at their hospitals nationwide. In addition, most pit bulls that come into the shelter are not puppies that come from unwanted litters, but are generally adult dogs that have become homeless due to a variety of reasons including housing issues, owners moving to communities with breed bans, apartments that don't allow certain breeds or sizes of dogs, or an inability to comply with the city's mandatory spay/neuter ordinance for pit bulls.

### **The city said "we know that many pit bull owners simply do not want their animals altered." So why should the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance be repealed?**

In 2013, Kansas City, MO, received a \$100,000 grant from PetSmart Charities that was to offer free spay/neuter for pit bulls in two targeted ZIP codes. Unfortunately, 86% of the money was returned because it was not used. The reasons were many. The grant was very narrowly targeted toward one breed of dog in only two zip codes, and it would have been unlikely to be fully utilized, even if every pit bull in those ZIP codes had been neutered with the grant money.

Spay and Neuter Kansas City found the narrowly targeted grant to be a challenge, as they helped the city with door-to-door canvassing. For every pit bull we encountered, there were numerous other mixed breed dogs and cats in just as much need. A total of 113 families with pit bulls came forward to utilize the grant for surgery at Spay and Neuter Kansas City. Interestingly, in 5 other ZIP codes throughout Kansas City, MO, Spay and Neuter Kansas City spayed and neutered over 1,400 pit bull type dogs during the grant period. This is inconsistent with the idea that pit bull owners won't get their pets altered.



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Additionally, because of the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance having criminal penalties, many pit bull owners were afraid to come forward with their unaltered pit bulls for fear that they would receive fines for violating the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance, or they were concerned their pet would be impounded. This fear is one of the reasons that community outreach programs such as Spay and Neuter Kansas City are so important – because they offer assistance to low-income families who need help with the cost and access to spay neuter services. This community strengthening approach is traditionally favored over the fear of prosecution due to ordinances a family was either unaware of or with which they could not financially comply.

### **What about public safety?**

There is no information that would indicate that the ordinance has improved public safety. By eliminating the mandatory ordinance, it will allow animal control to better allocate resources directly toward cruelty and neglect cases, as well as for animals that demonstrate dangerous or potentially dangerous behavior. Problematic pit bulls would still be addressed by the comprehensive reckless pet owner ordinance while targeting non-problematic pit bulls would be precluded, eliminating a wasteful use of resources.

### **Won't losing this law impair our ability to crack down on "back yard breeders?"**

Proper enforcement of cruelty/neglect, along with some new provisions in the proposed ordinance will target more "back yard breeders" than our current ordinance. One major improvement under the proposed ordinance is that puppies under 8 weeks of age cannot be housed outdoors. This will capture the problematic cases of back yard breeding, regardless of the breed of the dogs involved.

### **What do leading national organizations think about mandatory spay & neuter laws?**

Nearly all of the leading national animal welfare organizations have come out in opposition to mandatory spay/neuter laws. Visit their websites for their position statements on mandatory spay neuter.

- ASPCA <http://www.asPCA.org/nyc/mobile-spay-neuter-clinic/position-statement-on-mandatory-spayneuter-laws>
- Best Friends Animal Society <https://bestfriends.org/about-best-friends/policies-and-position-statements>
- American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)  
<https://www.avma.org/News/JAVMANews/Pages/090515j.aspx>
- American College of Theriogenologists (ACT) & Society for Theriogenology (SFT)  
<https://www.therio.org/page/PositionStatement?#SpayNeuter>
- California Sheltering White Paper <http://www.cashelteringreport.org/whitepaper/>
- American Kennel Club <https://www.akc.org/clubs-delegates/government-relations/government-relations-blogs/akc-clarifies-position-statements-related-spaying-neutering/>
- Spay and Neuter Kansas City <https://snkc.net/about-spay-neuter-kansas-city/>



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