



Testimony

of

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before the

New York City Council Committee on State and Federal Legislation

On the

Proposed Resolution to Support Legislation Enhancing Shelter Services in New York City

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Committee Room – City Hall

New York City

Good morning Chairwoman Koslowitz and members of the Committee. My name is Mario Merlino, and I am the Assistant Commissioner for Veterinary and Pest Control Services in the Division of Environmental Health at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. I am joined here today by Corinne Schiff, Director of Special Projects, in the Division of Environmental Health. Thank you for inviting me to testify in support of the Council's Home Rule message in support of A2046 and S5048, legislation that would enhance shelter services in New York City, by allowing the City to set the dog license fee.

The Department has pursued this legislation because its enactment would enable the Department to modernize its dog licensing program, increase the proportion of dogs that are licensed, and raise critical revenue to support the animals cared for in the City's animal shelters.

Let me briefly review a few key reasons that we support the bill:

- **NYC should have the same authority as other NY localities.**

The New York State Agriculture and Markets law directs localities to issue dog licenses and authorizes them to charge an amount they see fit, but NYC different from all other municipalities in that it is governed by an unconsolidated law enacted in 1894, and not this Agriculture and Markets statute. The 1894 law mandates that the City issue dog licenses, but prohibits the City from establishing the license fee. This legislation would establish a uniform approach to dog licensing around the state.

- **The license fee was intended to fully support Animal Care and Control activities, but no longer covers even the cost of issuing the license**

A license for altered dogs in New York City costs dog owners only \$8.50, an amount that has not changed since 1974, and it is now - as you can see from the graph at the bottom of my written testimony - one of the lowest of any major city in the country.

The revenue generated by dog licensing was intended to help defray the cost of the animal care and control program, but because it has remained \$8.50 for forty years, it no longer even covers the costs of issuing the license. This legislation would allow the New York City Council, working the Department, to set an appropriate dog license fee.

- **New York City will seek local legislation to raise revenue and enable improved animal care services.**

If the legislation is enacted, New York City will seek local legislation to set a reasonable license fee and generate revenue needed to support improvements underway in the city animal shelters. Thanks to the City Council, the Department has increased the budget for Animal Care & Control, the non-profit under contract to operate animal shelters, already by more than two-thirds and by 2015, by 77 percent, improving veterinary care and shelter maintenance. These enhancements make sheltered animals more likely to be placed in new homes.

- **Obtaining a license will be easier for dog owners**

The legislation will make it easier for dog owners to obtain licenses in a variety of ways. The legislation would provide added incentives for third parties to issue licenses, and we will work to facilitate licensing at points of sale, such as veterinary clinics and pet events. The City will improve on-line licensing, streamlining it to enable dog owners to certify the spay/neuter status of their dog, and to, if they wish, purchase a multi-year license.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

