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The Honorable Kathleen A. Marchione
New York State Senate
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building, Rm. 306
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Senator Marchione,

I am writing in support of S.1081, the proposed bill to divert monies (20%) from the state Animal Population Control Program to fund Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) efforts to decrease the number of feral cats. Bird and wildlife conservatory groups and some public health officials oppose TNR programs, arguing that feral cats are a major threat to songbirds, wildlife populations and public health. While some risks do exist (with which we are currently living), the real issue is the magnitude of those risks and why an approach such as TNR (aimed at reducing the number of cats in the environment) is not an acceptable tool to reduce them.

Opponents argue that TNR does not work based on a few examples where it has failed to reduce cat numbers. Yet, there are also numerous published studies and testimonials demonstrating its efficacy.¹⁻⁴ It is unclear why we should expect any one strategy to work everywhere to resolve a complex, biological, sociological and ecological problem. Vaccination for influenza prevention does not always work and is associated with some risks. Should we abandon influenza vaccination because it has risks and is not always effective?

TNR is one strategy in a toolbox of measures to reduce feral cat populations used by animal welfare groups. These groups (not bird, wildlife or public health organizations) are also spending millions of dollars annually to advocate for responsible pet ownership and fund spay/neuter and educational programs to reduce cat populations. Animal welfare groups (supporting TNR) also support research aimed at the development of safe, non-surgical sterilants that can be widely and cheaply distributed. The Alliance for Contraception in Cats and Dogs (ACC&D) (<http://www.acc-d.org/>) (funded partially by groups advocating for TNR) is one such organization whose mission is to convene expertise and raise funds to develop non-surgical sterilants. ACC&D's efforts led the Found Animals Foundation to launch the Mickelson Prize and Grants Program for research (committing \$75 million) to develop non-surgical options for controlling cat and dog reproduction (<http://www.michelsonprizeandgrants.org/>). More

researchers than ever are working on more effective tools, but in the meantime, TNR is helping to reduce feral cat numbers.

Rather than TNR, opposing groups advocate for capturing and euthanizing free-roaming cats. Animal welfare and veterinary organizations reject this as a solution on several grounds. First, trapping and euthanizing cat is not a good animal welfare practice when other approaches exist; second, trapping and euthanizing animals is often not the optimal approach (as demonstrated in the wildlife literature^{5,6}), and third, trapping and euthanizing millions of cats is not realistic or feasible in the U.S. today. Advocates for trap and euthanize cite the results of theoretical, mathematical models suggesting that trap and euthanize programs could achieve feral cat reductions faster than those using TNR. These models are greatly simplified simulations of a complex biological, ecological, and sociological problem and none are complex enough to mimic reality. The reality is that it is highly unlikely that legislators will introduce legislation to mandate trapping and euthanizing large numbers of free-roaming cats. The public backlash would be enormous. The cost of trapping and euthanizing millions of cats would cost millions of dollars. Today most TNR programs are funded primarily by national or local animal welfare organizations that use private donations, or through corporate charities (e.g., PetSmart or PetCo) that solicit donations from customers at checkout. The person-power to trap cats for TNR programs is almost exclusively provided by volunteers, driven by their passion for the cats. These same people and organizations would mobilize to thwart any efforts to kill cats on a large scale.

Cats do pose risks to bird and wildlife populations⁷, but no-one knows the magnitude of those risks to a large region such as New York State. This lack of information reflects the difficulty of studying such phenomena on a large scale and the confounding factors of habitat destruction, human development and other predators. There are areas (where birds or wildlife are particularly vulnerable) where TNR should not be practiced, but that is not everywhere in the state.

Public health risks exist, but are minimal.^{7,8} If this were not so, CDC and state health departments would have major programs to reduce cat populations; the National Institutes of Health would earmark millions of dollars for research to eliminate the threat. Such programs and funding do not exist because the risks are minuscule (and acceptable) compared to the major threats to public health today.

Supporters and opponents alike agree that there are *too many feral cats*. They differ on how to address the problem. TNR advocates believe that TNR has proven to be an effective tool (combined with other approaches) to reduce cat populations in many areas. Opponents suggest widespread trap and euthanize programs instead, a strategy very unlikely to ever be adopted, now or in the future. If S.1081 is defeated, fewer cats will be sterilized. Cats are prolific breeders

and feral cats populations are likely to increase. Ironically, the concerns of the bird, wildlife and other groups opposing the bill will almost assuredly be enhanced, at least until such time as a non-surgical sterilant is created and marketed.

So the choice is to live with the status quo (and watch cat populations grow) or to enhance the TNR efforts currently working to reduce feral cat numbers in many areas. I choose to support TNR efforts until more effective population control measures become available. For these reasons, I urge support of bill S.1081.

Sincerely,



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