

April 27, 2020

Governor Gretchen Whitmer
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear Governor Whitmer:

The undersigned animal welfare organizations are grateful for your exemplary leadership as we navigate the unprecedented challenges presented by COVID-19. We are deeply appreciative that animal care was deemed essential in the "Stay Home, Stay Safe" Executive Order. We respect the temporary restrictions placed on veterinary services in Executive Order 2020-34. As you are reviewing options and developing a strategy for the safe return to providing some services currently deemed nonessential, we are writing to ask that you consider allowing veterinarians to perform spay and neuter surgeries (hereinafter "sterilization") on companion animals.

Such a decision would be consistent with the federal guidelines for phasing out COVID-19 restrictions after certain criteria are met. Phase one of that process would allow a return to outpatient elective surgeries for human patients. When we reach that point in the process, we encourage you to consider lifting the current restriction on sterilization surgeries for companion animals, which is an animal equivalent of human outpatient surgery. Other states have begun lifting restrictions on sterilization.

Traditionally, sterilization procedures in animals have been key to improving animal health and welfare. Sterilization has significantly reduced pet overpopulation in this country. Sterilization also protects animals from some serious health problems and reduces many of the behavioral problems associated with the mating instinct. The importance of this has been recognized in a Michigan statute. Since January 1, 1998, the statute has required, with limited exceptions, that animal protection and animal control shelters "shall not permit a person to adopt a dog, cat, or ferret that has not been altered, unless that person has entered into a contract for the alteration of the dog, cat, or ferret with the animal control shelter or animal protection shelter." [MCL § 287.338a(1)]

Shelters, veterinarians, and other animal welfare organizations have gone to great lengths to educate the public about responsible pet ownership, and sterilization is a key component of that education. In fact, according to the Humane Society of the United States, "[t]hanks to decades of hard work by the humane field and veterinary professionals, 80 to 90 percent of owned cats and dogs in the U.S. are sterilized, showing that spay/neuter has become a mainstream norm of pet-keeping." The undersigned organizations are eager for Michigan veterinarians to be able to perform sterilization surgeries so that we do not lose ground in the battle to mainstream sterilization and so that we do not have the unintended consequence of countless unwanted litters, particularly in the spring and summer months when animals are reproducing at the highest rates.

We believe that sterilization surgery can be performed with minimal risk of COVID-19 exposure for clients and staff. Providers would observe all federal and state guidelines in the performance of sterilization surgeries to reduce risk while providing this critical animal care service.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this information.

Very truly yours,





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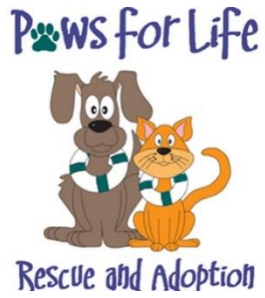
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