



January 24, 2013

Position Statement on Pet Limit Laws

Adopted by the Sonoma Humane Society Board of Directors

The Sonoma Humane Society (SHS) believes and advocates in the best policies, procedures, and practices as they apply to the animals of Sonoma County and beyond. To advocate for these positions, the SHS Board of Directors adopts the following:

The Sonoma Humane Society believes that Sonoma County should permanently suspend and eventually dispense with all pet limit laws.

As Sonoma County looks toward a future of zero euthanasia rates for treatable and rehabilitatable animals, we would underscore the critical nature of the roles performed by our local rescue and foster organizations, as well as private individuals and families in the area of animal welfare and protection. In fact all of these people and groups are critical pieces of the “No-Kill equation”¹.

Pet limit laws are, in and of themselves, more of a threat to the County and its people than they are a benefit. For example, those citizens, and there are many, who have more pets than the current law allows, will not license the “overage” of their animals out of fear of penalties (including actual confiscation of their pets) and worse, will likely not vaccinate them for rabies out of the same fear, since rabies vaccinations are reported to the County.

We should also ensure that those compassionate county citizens who care for our community (feral) cats are not having these animals counted as their pets. The numbers of these cats will not be imminently reduced significantly enough for us to ignore them, regardless of our efforts. Many of these cats provide a service to us, they are here to stay, and they will require care. Pet limit laws should not unfairly target community cat caregivers as “owners” and count community cats towards any pet limit.

In fact, there are a number of reasons that pet limit laws are counter-productive, and why many jurisdictions around the country are abandoning them. Even such densely populated


¹ *The No Kill Equation*, from “Redemption,” Nathan Winograd, 2007

communities such as New York City and Chicago do not have pet limit laws², and in an animal-friendly community like ours, we can do much, much better. We would underscore our statement with the following points:

- Pet limit laws are arbitrary. There is no data to support any particular number being assigned as a limit. And where one pet owner might be capable of caring for five animals, another might not be capable of caring for two.
- Pet limit laws contribute to an increased euthanasia rate. Responsible pet owners who are currently at their limit of four cats, for example, are prohibited from providing homes to even one more, regardless of their ability to do so. Euthanasia in Sonoma County would decrease measurably if these owners were allowed to keep a number of animals commensurate with their abilities to do so, and not limited by an arbitrary number.
- Pet limit laws tax county resources without good reason. There are many needs in our fiscally challenged community, and attempting to police and potentially confiscate a number of well cared for animals should not be on our list of requirements.
- Pet limit laws are unnecessary. Enforcement agencies already have ample ammunition at their disposal in terms of animal welfare, health and property rights laws. In fact, unsanitary conditions, excessive noise, and interference with property are all unlawful in virtually every community—regardless of whether pets inhabit the premises or not.³

Sonoma County should immediately suspend and eventually cancel all pet limit laws that are numerically based and instead move towards adoption and enforcement of standards of care.

We adopt this position today, [date], and declare it to be in accordance with the Sonoma Humane Society mission statement: *Ensuring every animal receives protection, compassion, love and care.*



Evelyn Mitchell, President
Sonoma Humane Society Board of Directors

² “Five Reasons Pet Limit Laws are a Bad Idea”, Julie Castle, Director, Community Programs and Services, Best Friends Animal Society, 2010

³ “Pet Limit Laws: Closing the Door to Loving Homes”, San Francisco SPCA, 2000