



Legislative Assembly

North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Agriculture Committee.

For the record, my name is Anna Novak, representative from district 33. HB1538 is a bill I am introducing on behalf of two North Dakota citizens. A senator approached me about sponsoring this bill on the first day of session. At that point, I had eight or nine bills I was planning to introduce and wasn't necessarily looking for another bill to sponsor. But when he told me about the idea, I just couldn't say no. I am an animal lover. I know many of the people on the committee and in this room feel the same way.

We have a real crisis on our hands right now with overpopulation of animals in North Dakota. Our animal shelters and animal foster homes are constantly full and usually overwhelmed. Overpopulation of animals may lead to neglect, abandonment and abuse. I think we've all heard situations of where animals are left on the side of the road, or someone has done something awful to an animal because the person deems the animal as "worthless". To me, that is wrong and absolutely heartbreaking. I have four sons and have always taught them that each animal is one of God's creatures and their lives must be respected.

I worked with Ag Commissioner Goehring on this bill. The initial plan was to add a fee or tax on every container of pet food. But as we know, anything involving the tax code is complex. Commissioner Goehring suggested using the environment and rangeland protection funds for this program, which is an existing fund so there doesn't have to be a new appropriation. Essentially, an animal shelter or foster care program can apply for these funds on a one for one match program to spay and neuter the animals in the program. The Agriculture Department will oversee the program. This is considered a one-time appropriation; however, I'm hopeful that if this passes, we will come back to the legislature in two years and see improvement in the issue of overrun animal shelters and foster homes. If there is real change, we can consider a continuing appropriation at that time.

I am thankful for Commissioner Goehring's leadership on this bill and for his suggestion of using the environment and rangeland protection funds for the spay and neuter awareness grant program. In my mind, the fact that it isn't a new appropriation makes this a much more reasonable request. I hope you'll agree and give HB1538 a Do-Pass recommendation.

With that, I'll stand for any questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.