

HOUSE BILL 1538
House Agriculture Committee
Testimony Presented by Sara Behrens
February 20, 2025

My name is Sara Behrens and I am the founder and president of Purrfect Pound Pals, a small, foster-based animal rescue in Lincoln, ND. I have been involved in animal rescue for over a decade and intimately understand the strains that the animal overpopulation puts on the rescue/shelter organizations in this state. Purrfect Pound Pals focuses on the animals in animal impounds in the state. The vast majority (I would say over 99%) of animals we pull from the impounds are not spayed or neutered. We also take on neonatal kittens without a mother that need bottle feeding. We have noticed a steady increase in the number of these kittens. We have a small budget (generally under \$50,000 per year) which consists of donations, adoption fees, and a small amount from sales of merchandise. We spend over 90% of those funds on veterinary care which includes spay and neuter and vaccinations. We do not adopt out cats that are not spayed or neutered.

This proposed grant program would be a wonderful step towards controlling the cat and dog population in North Dakota. Cats can have kittens at a very young age (sometimes as young as five months) and can have up to five litters in a year. While cat fertility decreases over time, there is no real "menopause" for cats. This is a lot of cats being produced and there simply are not enough homes for all of them.

While the bill simply establishes the program, there are programs in existence in other states which can be used by the Department of Agriculture to model a program after. Maine's Department of Agriculture has a grant program (Help Fix ME) which provides low cost spay/neuter assistance to those who qualify. https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ahw/animal_welfare/help-fix-me-program.shtml Maryland established a program through SB 820 in the 2013 Legislative Session to provide grants to local governments and non-profit animal welfare organizations. https://mda.maryland.gov/spay_neuter_program/pages/default.aspx. West Virginia has a similar program. <https://agriculture.wv.gov/divisions/animal-health/west-virginia-spay-and-neuter-assistance-program/#:~:text=WVSNP%20is%20a%20grant%20program,and%20an%20accompanying%20rabies%20vaccine>.

Currently, pet-related matters fall under the Livestock chapter of the North Dakota Century Code. Whether this is the appropriate place to address pets is perhaps something that should be looked at next session. However, right now it falls on this committee to handle these issues.

Animal rescues and shelters are overwhelmed and this program would go a long way to helping get the population under control. We appreciate you taking another look at this bill. Please vote do pass and help us to curtail the out-of-control pet population. Thank you.