



Pet Animal Coalition of Kansas



Kansas House of Representatives – Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Testimony submitted by: Courtney Thomas, President/CEO of Great Plains SPCA ; Founding board member and President of PACK (Pet Animal Coalition of Kansas)

(Contact information: 5428 Antioch Drive, Merriam, KS 66202; 913-742-7307;
cthomas@greatplainssPCA.org)

Testimony ***supporting 2016 HB 2554 with amendments***

As the President of Great Plains SPCA, I would like to share that my organization served over 35,000 pets in 2015. As one of the largest animal welfare agencies licensed in the state of Kansas, we care deeply about the laws governing animals and are impacted greatly by the success or failure of such laws.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture staff and the Kansas Pet Animal Advisory Board are to be commended for their diligent efforts and collaborative approach to review and propose important changes to the Kansas Pet Animal Act.

Shelter professionals such as myself, my colleagues, and the constituents that we serve have waited over five years for critical components of the Kansas Pet Animal Act to be updated that are negatively impacting our ability to do our jobs and serve the people of Kansas. Committee members, I'm here before you to respectfully convey that our businesses have waited long enough and am urging you to advance common sense legislation that will make a tremendous impact on our business efficiencies.

Because there are elements in the Kansas Pet Animal Act that are in critical need of updating, PACK (Pet Animal Coalition of Kansas) filed HB 2514 to update the Kansas Pet Animal Act, some of which overlaps with HB 2554 that I am asking you to support today. The components of HB 2554 that are the most critical to our business are allowing licensed rescues and shelters to utilize mobile adoption sites and expanding the Kansas Pet Animal Advisory Board to include a licensed Rescue Network Representative.

On behalf of PACK and Great Plains SPCA, I stand in support of the revisions presented in HB 2554 with a very important amendment.

There is one critical issue that impacts our shelter operations that is not written into the revised Kansas Pet Animal Act that the department has committed to continue to move forward. Currently, Kansas is the only state that does not allow the adoption or placement of non-symptomatic FIV+ cats.

PROPOSED CHANGE: Affording the Animal Health Commissioner the authority to approve the movement of FIV (+) cats into adoptive homes

Current Practice: Presently, animal shelters have two options for outcomes related to FIV (+) cats: (1) euthanize the cats even if they are healthy and non-symptomatic of illness or (2) house them indefinitely at the animal shelter. Neither of these options is considered “progressive” in a state priding itself in blazing a new path via being known as the “Animal Health Corridor of the World.”

However, “owned” cats are not doomed to death if they test positive for the FIV virus. For example, if you were to obtain a new kitten from a co-worker and took that kitten to your private veterinarian for an examination and the kitten tested positive for FIV, your private veterinarian is not forced to euthanize that cat. Instead, he/she counsels you on how the disease works, how it is transmitted, and shares that your FIV positive cat will likely live a long, healthy and relatively normal life with no symptoms of the disease. Should animal shelters not also be allowed to mimic this practice? Why are private practice veterinarians in a position to guide on future health and welfare of a FIV (+) cat, but shelter veterinarians with the same degree and education not allowed to do the same?

Whether an animal shelter has a veterinarian on staff or not, each is required by law through the Kansas Pet Animal Act to have a Program of Veterinary Care approved and in practice by a licensed veterinarian. Therefore, the same opportunity to educate pet owners on the disease exists whether in a shelter or private practice clinic.

Positive Impact: Shelters will not be forced to euthanize otherwise healthy cats who are FIV positive. Space will be freed up in statewide shelters by supporting and educating adopters. Additionally, there are people who want to adopt these cats and rescue organizations willing to take the cats on.

Impact if change to law doesn't occur: There is no law that exists today that requires shelters to test cats in their populations for FIV. Shelters test for this disease to be responsible and provide important information to future pet guardians. **Shelters across the state have shared they will consider no longer testing cats for FIV if the law does not change.** If shelters are unaware that a cat has FIV, they then are not forced to euthanize an otherwise healthy cat or continue to house the cat indefinitely at the shelter.

As is clear, our goal is for shelters to continue to be responsible and test for the disease and to allow informed adopters who are interested in providing FIV (+) cats a loving home the opportunity to do so. Further, it is important to note that **Kansas is the only state in the country that does not allow the placement of FIV (+) cats. Our neighboring state of Missouri, does allow this practice.**

The following represents the opinions of the American Association of Feline Practitioners and the Cornell Feline Health Center at Cornell University:

- The Feline Immuno-deficiency Virus is a slow virus that affects a cat's immune system over a period of years.
- FIV is a cat-only disease and cannot be spread to humans or other non-felines.
- FIV cats most often live long, healthy, and relatively normal lives with no symptoms at all.
- FIV is not easily passed between cats. It cannot be spread casually in litter boxes, water and food bowls, or when snuggling and playing. It is rarely spread from a mother to her kittens.
- The virus can be spread through blood transfusions, badly infected gums, or serious, penetrating bite wounds. (Bite wounds of this kind are extremely rare, except in free-roaming, unneutered tomcats.)
- A neutered cat, in a home, is extremely unlikely to infect other cats, if properly introduced.
- FIV-positive cats should be kept as healthy as possible. Keep them indoors and free from stress, feed them a high-quality diet, keep and treat any secondary problems as soon as they arise.

This important and necessary element can be addressed in three ways:

- Change to statute
- An amendment to current statute
- Internal written policy within the Department of Agriculture

It is my recommendation that **an amendment to current law be made which provides the Animal Health Commissioner the authority to approve the movement of FIV positive cats into adoptive homes.**

We believe that the following updates are critical to the successful operation of shelters and rescues across our state, while ensuring the highest quality of care and standards for the animals we serve. **I would ask the committee to direct the department to continue to work on these very important additions through an amendment process, while continuing to move the bill forward.**

Again, I would like to applaud the efforts of the department and the Kansas Pet Animal Advisory Board as they have sought out the thoughts and recommendations of their constituent bases while crafting the proposed changes to the Kansas Pet Animal Act.

We have an opportunity to be a part of the foundation that helps us build a progressive model in our state statutes and I challenge you all to play an active role in helping us to reach a heightened level of success in the state we all call home.

Respectfully submitted by Courtney Thomas, President and CEO of Great Plains SPCA and President of the Pet Animal Coalition of Kansas