

Dear Chair Kropf and members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

I am writing to recommend amendments to HB3604 that are necessary for my support of this bill. Although I appreciate that this bill might help address a problem that exists in Marion and Washington counties as well as some others, it contains language that may have serious unintended consequences for outdoor cats in other counties that already have safeguards in place to address the issue that this bill is addressing. It will create more opportunities for confusion in Lane and other Oregon counties who currently have functional programs for stray cat management, and likely result in fewer cats being reunited with their owners.

There is ample research showing that the best way to ensure reunification of a cat with its owner is to leave it where it is. Stray dogs are not stray cats, as cats are legally allowed to be free-roaming. (A 2018 cat ownership survey found that 2/3 of pet cats have outdoor access.) The national RTO (Return to Owner) rate for cats entering shelters is a dismal 3-6%. This is why many shelters do not accept healthy outdoor adult cats that well-meaning people bring to the shelter, mistakenly believing they are stray or lost. Return-to-field (RTF) programs are one of the best tools for preventing overpopulation and ensuring stable and healthy outdoor cat communities. As it's currently drafted, this bill helps solidify the legality of doing this, which I support.

However, this bill increases the number of organizations that will be able to legally accept free-roaming cats and transfer ownership or euthanize the cat within a relatively short timeframe. This is a good thing for cats and cat owners when the organization taking on this responsibility is fully capable of providing appropriate housing and care, as well as engaging in all the communications and processes necessary to reunite a cat with its owner. It is not a good thing if the organization can't provide the necessary care, and/or their ability to find an owner is inadequate. In Lane County, we have a system that is working well because the organization that is responsible for sheltering stray cats can provide the necessary care and has a robust return-to-owner program that has been in place for over a decade. The community knows and trusts the system. Expanding to allow almost anyone- even an unlicensed animal rescue- to perform this work, could result in a breakdown of the system, unintentional suffering of injured and sick cats, and fewer cats being reunited with their owners.

The current version of the bill needs major revisions to address these loopholes. This includes language ensuring that:

- only a licensed Animal Rescue Entity (ARE) with a shelter veterinarian on staff would be allowed to perform this important work
- reporting of lost cats is directed to the appropriate entity
- clarifying the parameters for euthanasia of pets by the ARE, in order to prevent unnecessary suffering of cats requiring emergency care.

It's important to know that currently there are **no rules** for AREs on minimum care standards, prevention of infectious disease, or humane handling of pets in the ARE's care. Only the larger AREs that employ shelter veterinarians are able to ensure that injured, sick, or

chronically ill cats are identified and provided immediate treatment, and that humane care and housing standards are always followed. Nothing in this bill addresses what happens with sick or dying cats taken in by well-meaning lay individuals who incorrectly assess that immediate care is not needed, or who choose not to provide care for financial or other reasons. Section 8(a) does not address this issue, as it could reasonably be inferred that **only** once a veterinarian has recommended treatment does it need to be provided. Proper identification of sick or suffering animals requires trained veterinary professionals, something unlikely to be present at most AREs. The last thing anyone wants is a well-meaning citizen to bring someone's injured pet to a location where urgent care isn't provided and the owner can't find the cat until it's too late. This bill needs to be amended to ensure that veterinary oversight and care is provided to EVERY cat.

I sincerely want to help improve the situation in communities that don't already have a good solution in place. But I think we all also want to ensure that any new legislation doesn't cause more harm than good for cats throughout the state. The bill in its current form would put many indoor/outdoor cats at serious risk of harm by well-meaning lay persons who may lack the knowledge or proper facilities for humanely holding and managing stray cat populations. If adjustments can be made to the bill to address these concerns, then I could support it. We just need to be sure that addressing one county's legitimate concern doesn't dismantle other counties' successful stray cat programs. Let's work together to create a bill that works for ALL of Oregon!

Sincerely,

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