

Model Ordinance – Shelter Reunification of Lost or Stray Pets

MUNICIPALITY

ORDINANCE NUMBER

AN ORDINANCE to amend [SECTION] of the [MUNICIPAL STATUTES/CODE] relating to the return of lost or stray cats or dogs to their owners.

WHEREAS, Pet cats or dogs may be separated from their owners in times of crisis; and

WHEREAS, Pets that have been separated from their owners often end up in the care of an animal shelter, animal control agency, or nonprofit humane group; and

WHEREAS, Ensuring animal welfare organizations have policies and procedures in place that prioritize reuniting dogs and cats with their owners will allow owners to reclaim their pets quickly and effectively;

NOW THEREFORE, The people of the [MUNICIPALITY] do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. The [MUNICIPAL STATUTE/CODE] is amended by adding new section [SECTION] as follows:

- a. The [MUNICIPAL GOVERNING BODY] finds that economic crises, changes of housing, or natural disasters may result in an increase in owned dogs and cats being held by animal control agencies or humane organizations. Dog and cat owners in [MUNICIPALITY] should be afforded the opportunity to quickly and reliably reclaim their pets. It is therefore declared to be the public policy of the [MUNICIPALITY] that animal control agencies and humane organizations shall adopt policies and procedures to help return cats or dogs to identified owners.
- b. (i) A public or private animal shelter, humane organization, or animal control agency operated by the [MUNICIPALITY] or a humane organization that takes receivership of any lost or stray dogs or cats shall adopt written policies and procedures to ensure that every reasonable effort is made to quickly and reliably return owned animals to their owners. Such policies and procedures shall include, but are not limited to:
 - (1) Upon intake, screening of lost or stray dogs and cats for identification, including tags, licenses, implanted microchips, and tattoos;
 - (2) A process for matching received lost or stray dogs and cats with any reports of lost pets received by the shelter from owners;

- (3) Public notice of lost or stray dogs and cats received, provided at the shelter or on the Internet, as appropriate, within 48 hours of the animal's admission;
- (4) Reasonable efforts to notify identified owners of lost or stray dogs and cats within 48 hours of identification. Such reasonable efforts may include, but are not limited to, attempts to contact identified owners by telephone, by electronic mail, by United States mail, or by personal service at the owner's last known phone number and address;
- (5) Notice to the public of the shelter's location, hours, fees, and the return-to-owner process posted on the Internet, with the shelter's business hours posted outside the shelter facility and recorded on the shelter's telephone answering system message;
- (6) Access for owners to retrieve dogs and cats at least 1 weekend day per week and after 5:00 p.m. 1 weekday per week, provided that complying with the requirements of this subparagraph does not require an increase in total operating hours;
- (7) Direct return-to-owner protocols that allow animal control officers in the field to directly return lost or stray dogs and cats to their owners when the owners have been identified;
- (8) Procedural safeguards to minimize the euthanasia of owned dogs and cats. Such safeguards shall include, but are not limited to, record verification to ensure that each animal to be euthanized is the correct animal designated for the procedure and proper scanning for an implanted microchip using a universal scanner immediately prior to the procedure; and
- (9) Temporary extension of local minimum stray hold periods after a disaster is declared by the President of the United States or a state of emergency is declared by the Governor, if deemed necessary [MUNICIPAL GOVERNING BODY].

- (ii) Records related to this section and maintained by a public or private animal shelter, humane organization, or animal control agency operated by a humane society or by a county, municipality, or other incorporated political subdivision must be made available to the public.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

Explanation of the Model Ordinance

a. Section 1(a)

While this section does not create any binding law *per se*, it affords an opportunity to declare that it is the public policy of the municipality that lost pet cats and dogs should be reunited with rightful owners and animal control agencies and humane organizations should adopt policies and procedures to promote this priority.

b. Section 1(b)

This section provides that animal shelters, animal control agencies, and humane organizations that takes in lost or stray cats and dogs must adopt policies and procedures to ensure that every reasonable effort is taken to reunite lost pets with their rightful owners. At a minimum, these policies and procedures must include the following:

- screening of lost or stray dogs and cats for identification, including tags, licenses, implanted microchips, and tattoos upon intake;
- a process for matching received lost or stray dogs and cats with any reports of lost pets received by the shelter from owners;
- public notice provided at the shelter or the Internet of lost or stray dogs and cats received within 48 hours of admission;
- reasonable efforts to notify identified owners of lost or stray dogs and cats within 48 hours of identification via telephone, e-mail, regular mail, or personal service;
- public notice of the shelter's location, hours, fees, and the return-to-owner process posted on the Internet, with the shelter's business hours posted outside the shelter facility and recorded on the shelter's telephone answering system message;
- access for owners to retrieve dogs and cats at least 1 weekend day per week and after 5:00 p.m. 1 weekday per week, as long as it does not require an increase in total operating hours;
- return-to-owner protocols that allow animal control officers in the field to directly return lost or stray dogs and cats to their identified owners;
- procedural safeguards to minimize the euthanasia of owned dogs and cats; and
- temporary extension of local minimum stray hold periods after a disaster or state of emergency is declared by the President of the United States or the Governor.

All related records maintained by affected organizations are to be made publicly available to ensure compliance and accountability.