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A non-profit coalition of organizations training Assistance Dogs

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April 3, 2007

The Honorable Mike Eng, Chair
Committee on Business and Professions
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0049

VIA FACSIMILE (916) 319-2149

Dear Assemblyman Eng:

I am writing to voice my strong opposition to Assembly Bill 1634 (Levine). As the CEO of Canine Companions for Independence and the President of Assistance Dogs International, North American Section, I can assure you that passage of this assembly bill would have a devastating impact on both the ability of assistance dog organizations to operate within California and the ability of those Californians who are disabled to receive assistance dogs.

While this bill, which would mandate surgical sterilization for all dogs over the age of four months, states that assistance dogs (i.e., guide, service and signal dogs) would be exempted from the requirement if they were in training or trained, this exemption is nonsensical when applied to puppies that are four months old. CCI, as well as every other reputable assistance dog organization, does not begin training dogs until they are over a year old; new breeders to supply the next generation of assistance dogs are not selected until they are close to two years old, so that sufficient health and behavioral data is available to ensure that the dogs selected represent the healthiest and soundest stock available. (Surely, this scrutiny does more to advance the health and well-being of dogs than making the decision concerning which dogs will breed and which will not when they are 16 week old puppies, which is what this bill would mandate.)

Further, when assistance dog organizations seek to acquire outside dogs for their breeding programs (to prevent inbreeding and maintain genetic diversity), it is to small, private breeders whom we turn. These 'hobby' breeders produce healthy, sound animals because most of them are passionate about their avocation and invest the necessary time and care to breed the healthiest, highest quality dogs. Commercial operations, exempted under AB 1634, are much more likely to supply those dogs that are sold through pet stores and to testing laboratories.

While AB 1634 is titled the “California Healthy Pets Act,” the title is a misnomer. Surgical sterilization of preadult dogs has been shown to increase the risk for several behavioral and health problems, including urinary incontinence, osteosarcoma, hemangiosarcoma, obesity and interdog aggression. Canine Companions for Independence did a study on the effects of prepubertal sterilization in 1990, and found both increased health problems and increased failure rate in those dogs that had been sterilized early.

While there are certainly other excellent reasons for opposing this bill, chief among them being that it would not achieve its stated goal of reducing the population in California’s shelters, my chief concern is the disastrous effect this bill would have on assistance and other working dogs. Therefore, I hope you will oppose AB 1634 and look forward to your reply. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Corey Hudson

President, Assistance Dogs International, North American Section

CEO, Canine Companions for Independence