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**SENATE BILL NO. 897**

Offered January 14, 2009

Prefiled December 31, 2008

*A BILL to amend and reenact § 3.2-6546 of the Code of Virginia, relating to companion animals.*

Patron—McDougle

Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:****1. That § 3.2-6546 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:**

§ 3.2-6546. County or city pounds; confinement and disposition of animals; affiliation with foster care providers; penalties; injunctive relief.

A. For purposes of this section:

"Animal" shall not include agricultural animals.

"Rightful owner" means a person with a right of property in the animal.

B. The governing body of each county or city shall maintain or cause to be maintained a pound and shall require dogs running at large without the tag required by § 3.2-6531 or in violation of an ordinance passed pursuant to § 3.2-6538 to be confined therein. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit confinement of other companion animals in such a pound. The governing body of any county or city need not own the facility required by this section but may contract for its establishment with a private group or in conjunction with one or more other local governing bodies. The governing body shall require that:

1. The pound shall be accessible to the public at reasonable hours during the week;

2. The pound shall obtain a signed statement from each of its directors, operators, staff, or animal caregivers specifying that each individual has never been convicted of animal cruelty, neglect, or abandonment, and each pound shall update such statement as changes occur;

3. If a person contacts the pound inquiring about a lost companion animal, the pound shall advise the person if the companion animal is confined at the pound or if a companion animal of similar description is confined at the pound;

4. The pound shall maintain a written record of the information on each companion animal submitted to the pound by an animal shelter in accordance with subsection D of § 3.2-6548 for a period of 30 days from the date the information is received by the pound. If a person contacts the pound inquiring about a lost companion animal, the pound shall check its records and make available to such person any information submitted by an animal shelter or allow such person inquiring about a lost animal to view the written records;

5. The pound shall maintain a written record of the information on each companion animal submitted to the pound by a releasing agency other than a pound or animal shelter in accordance with subdivision F 2 of § 3.2-6549 for a period of 30 days from the date the information is received by the pound. If a person contacts the pound inquiring about a lost companion animal, the pound shall check its records and make available to such person any information submitted by such releasing agency or allow such person inquiring about a lost companion animal to view the written records; and

6. The pound shall maintain a written record of the information on each companion animal submitted to the pound by an individual in accordance with subdivision A 2 of § 3.2-6551 for a period of 30 days from the date the information is received by the pound. If a person contacts the pound inquiring about a lost companion animal, the pound shall check its records and make available to such person any information submitted by the individual or allow such person inquiring about a lost companion animal to view the written records.

C. An animal confined pursuant to this section shall be kept for a period of not less than five days, such period to commence on the day immediately following the day the animal is initially confined in the facility, unless sooner claimed by the rightful owner thereof.

The operator or custodian of the pound shall make a reasonable effort to ascertain whether the animal has a collar, tag, license, tattoo, or other form of identification. If such identification is found on the animal, the animal shall be held for an additional five days, unless sooner claimed by the rightful owner. If the rightful owner of the animal can be readily identified, the operator or custodian of the pound shall make a reasonable effort to notify the owner of the animal's confinement within the next 48 hours following its confinement.

If any animal confined pursuant to this section is claimed by its rightful owner, such owner may be charged with the actual expenses incurred in keeping the animal impounded. In addition to this and any

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59 other fees that might be levied, the locality may, after a public hearing, adopt an ordinance to charge the  
60 owner of an animal a fee for impoundment and increased fees for subsequent impoundments of the same  
61 animal.

62 D. If an animal confined pursuant to this section has not been claimed upon expiration of the  
63 appropriate holding period as provided by subsection C, it shall be deemed abandoned and become the  
64 property of the pound.

65 Such animal may be euthanized in accordance with the methods approved by the State Veterinarian  
66 or disposed of by the methods set forth in subdivisions 1 through 5. No pound shall release more than  
67 two animals or a family of animals during any 30-day period to any one person under subdivisions 2, 3,  
68 or 4.

69 1. Release to any humane society, animal shelter, or other releasing agency within the  
70 Commonwealth, provided that each humane society, animal shelter, or other releasing agency obtains a  
71 signed statement from each of its directors, operators, staff, or animal caregivers specifying that each  
72 individual has never been convicted of animal cruelty, neglect, or abandonment and updates such  
73 statements as changes occur;

74 2. Adoption by a resident of the county or city where the pound is operated and who will pay the  
75 required license fee, if any, on such animal, provided that such resident has read and signed a statement  
76 specifying that he has never been convicted of animal cruelty, neglect, or abandonment;

77 3. Adoption by a resident of an adjacent political subdivision of the Commonwealth, if the resident  
78 has read and signed a statement specifying that he has never been convicted of animal cruelty, neglect,  
79 or abandonment;

80 4. Adoption by any other person, provided that such person has read and signed a statement  
81 specifying that he has never been convicted of animal cruelty, neglect, or abandonment, and provided  
82 that no dog or cat may be adopted by any person who is not a resident of the county or city where the  
83 pound is operated, or of an adjacent political subdivision, unless the dog or cat is first sterilized, and the  
84 pound may require that the sterilization be done at the expense of the person adopting the dog or cat; or

85 5. Release for the purposes of adoption or euthanasia only, to an animal shelter, or any other  
86 releasing agency located in and lawfully operating under the laws of another state, provided that such  
87 animal shelter, or other releasing agency: (i) maintains records that would comply with § 3.2-6557; (ii)  
88 requires that adopted dogs and cats be sterilized; (iii) obtains a signed statement from each of its  
89 directors, operators, staff, and animal caregivers specifying that each individual has never been convicted  
90 of animal cruelty, neglect, or abandonment, and updates such statement as changes occur; and (iv) has  
91 provided to the pound, animal shelter, or other releasing agency within the Commonwealth a statement  
92 signed by an authorized representative specifying the entity's compliance with clauses (i) through (iii),  
93 and the provisions of adequate care and performance of humane euthanasia, as necessary in accordance  
94 with the provisions of this chapter.

95 For purposes of recordkeeping, release of an animal by a pound to a pound, animal shelter or other  
96 releasing agency shall be considered a transfer and not an adoption. If the animal is not first sterilized,  
97 the responsibility for sterilizing the animal transfers to the receiving entity.

98 Any proceeds deriving from the gift, sale, or delivery of such animals shall be paid directly to the  
99 treasurer of the locality. Any proceeds deriving from the gift, sale, or delivery of such animals by an  
100 animal shelter or other releasing agency shall be paid directly to the clerk or treasurer of the animal  
101 shelter or other releasing agency for the expenses of the society and expenses incident to any agreement  
102 concerning the disposing of such animal. No part of the proceeds shall accrue to any individual except  
103 for the aforementioned purposes.

104 E. Nothing in this section shall prohibit *the immediate administration of vaccinations and other*  
105 *veterinary care to any animal confined by a releasing agency. Nor shall anything in this section prohibit*  
106 *the immediate euthanasia of a critically injured, critically ill, or unweaned animal for humane purposes.*  
107 Any animal euthanized pursuant to the provisions of this chapter shall be euthanized by one of the  
108 methods prescribed or approved by the State Veterinarian.

109 F. Nothing in this section shall prohibit the immediate euthanasia or disposal by the methods listed in  
110 subdivisions 1 through 5 of subsection D of an animal that has been released to a pound, animal shelter,  
111 other releasing agency, or animal control officer by the animal's rightful owner after the rightful owner  
112 has read and signed a statement: (i) surrendering all property rights in such animal; (ii) stating that no  
113 other person has a right of property in the animal; and (iii) acknowledging that the animal may be  
114 immediately euthanized or disposed of in accordance with subdivisions 1 through 5 of subsection D.

115 G. Nothing in this section shall prohibit any feral dog or feral cat not bearing a collar, tag, tattoo, or  
116 other form of identification that, based on the written statement of a disinterested person, exhibits  
117 behavior that poses a risk of physical injury to any person confining the animal, from being euthanized  
118 after being kept for a period of not less than three days, at least one of which shall be a full business  
119 day, such period to commence on the day the animal is initially confined in the facility, unless sooner  
120 claimed by the rightful owner. The statement of the disinterested person shall be kept with the animal as

required by § 3.2-6557. For purposes of this subsection, a disinterested person shall not include a person releasing or reporting the animal.

H. No pound shall place a companion animal in a foster home with a foster care provider unless the foster care provider has read and signed a statement specifying that he has never been convicted of animal cruelty, neglect, or abandonment, and each pound shall update such statement as changes occur. The pound shall maintain the original statement and any updates to such statement in accordance with this chapter and for at least so long as the pound has an affiliation with the foster care provider.

I. A pound that places a companion animal in a foster home with a foster care provider shall ensure that the foster care provider complies with § 3.2-6503.

J. If a pound finds a direct and immediate threat to a companion animal placed with a foster care provider, it shall report its findings to the animal control agency in the locality where the foster care provider is located.

K. The governing body shall require that the pound be operated in accordance with regulations issued by the Board. If this chapter or such regulations are violated, the locality may be assessed a civil penalty by the Board or its designee in an amount that does not exceed \$1,000 per violation. Each day of the violation is a separate offense. In determining the amount of any civil penalty, the Board or its designee shall consider: (i) the history of previous violations at the pound; (ii) whether the violation has caused injury to, death or suffering of, an animal; and (iii) the demonstrated good faith of the locality to achieve compliance after notification of the violation. All civil penalties assessed under this section shall be recovered in a civil action brought by the Attorney General in the name of the Commonwealth. Such civil penalties shall be paid into a special fund in the state treasury to the credit of the Department to be used in carrying out the purposes of this chapter.

L. If this chapter or any laws governing pounds are violated, the Commissioner may bring an action to enjoin the violation or threatened violation of this chapter or the regulations pursuant thereto regarding pounds, in the circuit court where the pound is located. The Commissioner may request the Attorney General to bring such an action, when appropriate.