



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

Op-Ed: A Step Forward for Dog Owners

José M. Serrano

December 24, 2014

There are approximately 600,000 dogs that call this city home. Neighborhoods like the Upper West and East Side are two of the most heavily “pup-ulated” neighborhoods in New York City due to their proximity to Central Park and other pet-friendly green spaces. Our love for dogs makes sense when you consider the countless studies which show the tremendous benefit dogs and other pets provide to us in so many ways. From alleviating depression and anxiety, to greatly improved overall health, our pets have given us more than we can ever attempt to repay them for.

But until recently our four-legged friends in New York City were disadvantaged by an outdated state law from 1894 that prohibited New York City from adjusting and setting its own dog licensing policy. The result was a system that lacked the funding and modernization needed to properly care for our city’s dogs.

Last week that all changed when Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed my dog licensing bill (S5048) into law. My bill, which passed through the State Senate and was championed by Brian Kavanagh in the New York State Assembly, finally allows our

city to join all other municipalities in New York State in setting its own dog licensing fees as well as streamlining the entire dog licensing process.

Animal advocates and average New Yorkers alike agree that our city's animal shelter system is woefully inadequate, which in large part is due to limited funding. This legislation will change this by giving the New York City Council and Health Department the power to work together to provide the best possible care for the city's lost and homeless animals. It would allow for increased revenue needed to maintain and expand our animal shelter system - an overburdened system that sees 30,000 of our animal friends every year. These improvements would include better overall care, increased chances of lost animals being returned home, improved resources available to help find good homes for unclaimed animals, and hopefully, the eventual opening of a shelter in each of the five boroughs (currently only Manhattan and Brooklyn have fully functional animal shelters).

In addition to empowering New York City to set its own fees, this bill will modernize and streamline the dog licensing process, making it easier than ever for dog-loving New Yorkers to comply with the law. The Health Department will be empowered to significantly reduce required paperwork, raise public awareness about dog licensing, promote community licensing events, and issue new discounted multi-year licenses. With more awareness and less red tape, more pets will be enrolled in the dog licensing program which will result in more dogs and owners enjoying great benefits. Some of the benefits include the Health Department's NYC Dog e-Locator System, return service for lost animals that have been recovered by Animal Care & Control of New York City, access to dog runs and off-leash areas, and helpful vaccine reminders to make sure your pet stays happy and healthy.

Support for this important and long overdue legislation has been overwhelming. My sincere thanks to the animal advocacy groups from all over the city that worked alongside myself and Assembly Member Kavanagh in the fight to get this bill passed. Groups like the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Friends of Animals, The Humane Society, Animal Care & Control of NYC (AC&C), and many others who played an important role in enthusiastically advocating for this legislation.

New York City remains one of the most animal-friendly places anywhere, and we're all the better for it. This bill will ensure that we can properly care for our amazing animal friends for generations to come. My sincere thanks Mayor DeBlasio for

advocating for this bill, and to Governor Cuomo for his support, and for signing this legislation into law.

Serrano represents the 29th District in the New York State Senate. For more information on dog licensing in NYC, visit nyc.gov/doglicense.

- See more at: <http://ourtownny.com/columnsop-ed/20141225/op-ed-a-step-forward-for-dog-owners#sthash.64Ouxu5K.dpuf>