

Summary – Please lay the anti-tethering bills SB 272 and HB 1552 on the table. Even the HSUS agrees that they are discriminatory and disproportionately impact lower-income pet owners and people of color. Further, the clause in these bills allowing for localities to make **more stringent** companion animal care laws needs to be struck so that disadvantaged pet owners will not lose the state protections.

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On February 19, 2020, before the House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources Committee, Senator Bell discussed his bill SB 272, which demands severe restrictions be placed on the tethering of dogs. Several delegates brought up questions about their constituents that do not have air conditioning in the house, may live in rented homes and trailers and have landlords that do not permit dogs in houses or allow fences and pens to be built. Senator Bell's solution to these situations was those people "... Should maybe consider whether they should have a dog or not." This seems very discriminatory.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has a program called Pets for Life. From their website is this mission statement:

"Pets for Life (PFL) is driven by social justice and guided by the philosophy that a deep connection with pets transcends socio-economic, racial and geographic boundaries, and no one should be denied the opportunity to experience the benefits, joy and comfort that come from the human-animal bond.

Systemic inequity and institutional barriers create immense challenges for millions of people every day in accessing pet resources and information. The extreme lack of access to pet resources is a national crisis. PFL is a thought leader in bringing attention to and advocating for people who are routinely overlooked or looked down upon and is an ally in fighting against economic and racial injustice."

Indeed, Amanda Arrington, founder of Beyond Fences and Director of the HSUS Pets for Life Program, states that tethering restrictions disproportionately impact lower income pet owners. And in many communities that means disproportionately communities of color. She states further, "Pet owners who tether often can't afford to build a fence or other method to contain their animals, leaving tethering as their only alternative. Many landlords don't allow pets inside, or charge high deposits so that people couldn't bring their dog in even if they wanted to." She also noted that such restrictions could make it impossible for some residents to own an animal at all. Does Virginia want to make pet ownership only available to people of a certain wealth?

In an article Ms. Arrington wrote in the Animal Sheltering Magazine, July 2019, she says,

“ . . . It’s important for everyone involved to understand how companion animal welfare is connected to larger systemic and institutional challenges for people and their pets—issues like poverty, segregation, housing insecurity and resource inequity.

That understanding has to flow into how we speak to those we serve, to each other as advocates and service providers, and to our supporters and donors and the general public. The narratives we create have genuine influence—and it is all too easy for our messaging to fall into the trap of creating extremely narrow definitions of who is capable of compassion or what compassion must look like.

I see this struggle regularly. We don’t always realize how our personal biases and assumptions can perpetuate dangerous myths about people. Take, for example, a common discussion around tethered dogs. What we often hear asked is, “Why would someone have a dog if they are just going to cruelly leave him chained up outside?” Instead of assuming that the owner is negligent or cruel, here’s a challenge: Try to understand the owner’s situation. Ask questions like: Does the person rent their home and have limitations from their landlord? Is the caretaker a senior with mobility issues? Does the dog have behavior issues? Is there a fence that needs expensive repairs?

If we’re truly open to the answers, we’ll often develop a more complete picture, and our response—in both programming and messaging—will likely be less judgmental and more effective.”

Please OPPOSE both the anti-tethering bills – SB 272 and HB 1552. They are bad for dogs AND people.

Alice Harrington

VFDCB Legislative Liaison

Cell – 703-965-7401

Email – aharrington4832@verizon.net