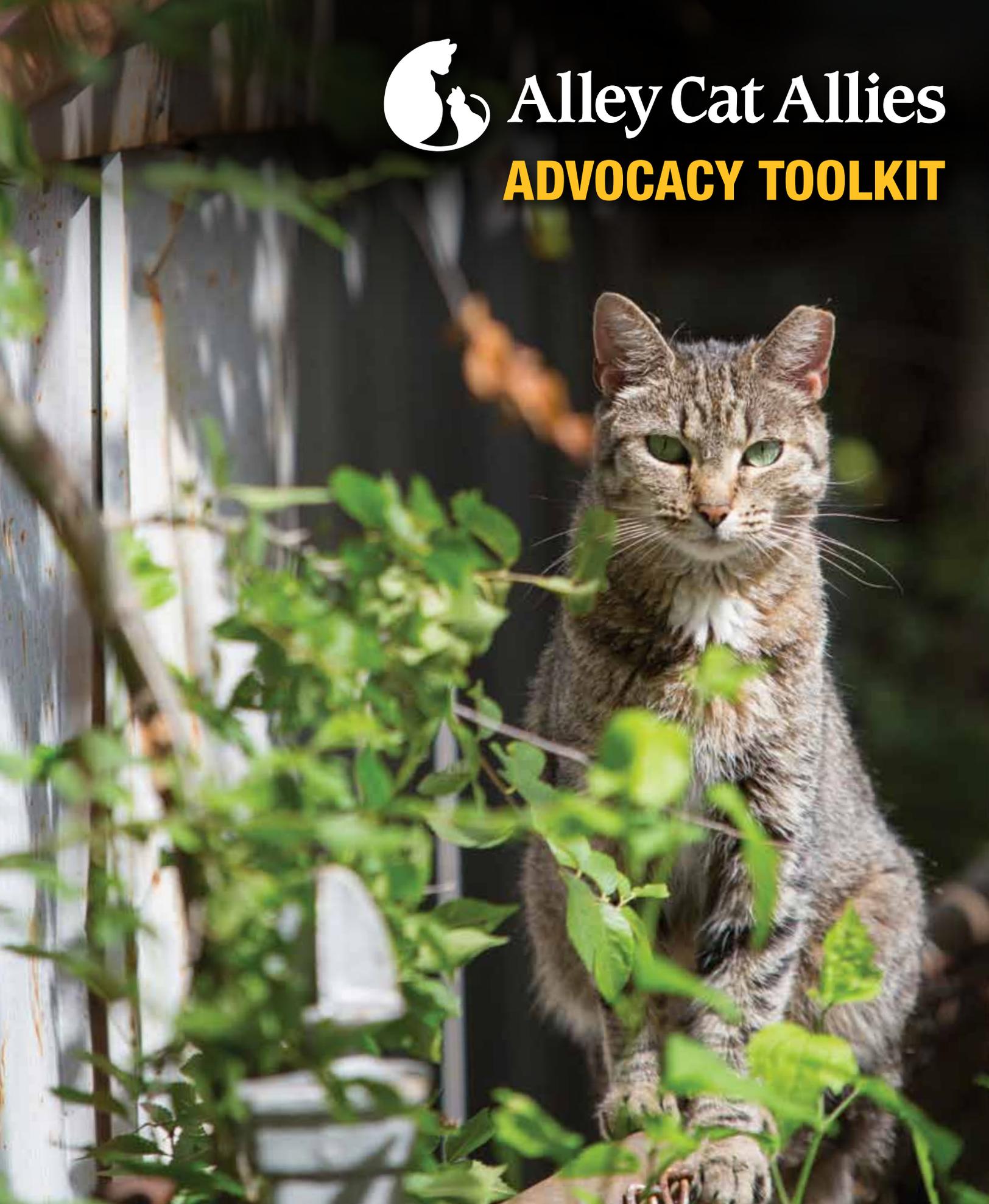




# Alley Cat Allies

## ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR HUMANE POLICIES FOR CATS IN YOUR COMMUNITY



Copyright © 2013 by Alley Cat Allies, Inc. All Rights Reserved.  
7920 Norfolk Avenue, Suite 600  
Bethesda, MD 20814-2525  
[www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)

Cover and above photo: Jason Putsché

This toolkit will arm you with the basics in citizen lobbying and prepare you to advocate for humane policies for cats.



## ADVOCATING FOR CATS

You are the cats' most powerful advocate in your own community. Your legislative representatives make decisions that affect the lives of cats living in your community, and they need to hear from you and other community members who support humane policies for cats.

In some cities and counties, compassionate citizens defend their right to perform Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) for feral cats, also called community cats. In others, people have to urge their officials to reject proposed laws that would send many community cats to animal pounds and shelters where they would be “euthanized.” You must urge your representatives to support policies that benefit cats—and prevent damaging laws from passing.

Advocating for cats may seem like a daunting task—but this toolkit will prepare you to speak out about the laws and policies that affect cats, and to rally your community to do the same. Improving community policies and ordinances will ultimately give all cats a greater level of protection than a TNR organization, feline rescue group, or individual can provide alone.

Alley Cat Allies is here to help you effect meaningful change and become an advocate for cats.

### 1. EDUCATE YOURSELF (page 4)

- What is Happening in Your Community? (4)
- How Ordinances and Policies Affect Cats (4)
- How a Bill Becomes a Law (7)

### 2. MAKE AN IMPACT (page 8)

- Send Emails or Letters to Legislators (8)
- Face to Face: Schedule a Meeting (8)
- Speak Out! Public Speaking and Testimony (9)

### 3. GROW THE CAUSE (page 10)

- Organize Your Community (10)
- Reach Out (10)

### 4. MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD (page 11)

- Take it to the Media (11)
- What to Say: Talking Points (11)
- Responding to Opponents (12)

### 5. RESOURCES (page 14)

- Sample Letters to Legislators (14)
- Sample Action Alert (17)
- Sample Public Testimony (18)
- Sample Letter to the Editor (18)

## 1. EDUCATE YOURSELF

### • What is Happening in Your Community?

Your first steps in a campaign for change will be to orient yourself to your local government structure, identify the appropriate decision makers, and build lines of communication with them. To better understand how various jurisdictions manage animal control, review Alley Cat Allies' resource, Guide to Local Government: Animal Control at [www.alleycat.org/AnimalControl](http://www.alleycat.org/AnimalControl).

Next, determine what kind of ordinances and laws are already in place. Does your community have laws that specifically apply to feral—or unowned—cats? Are other laws in your city or town being applied to feral cats? Does your community need new laws to help protect feral cats and their caregivers? Have laws been proposed that could help or harm feral cats?

When investigating your city or town's approach to feral cats, often called community cats, it's also important to consider who can help you in your efforts to advocate for community cats—and who might be an obstacle to your advocacy work. Do some research. Look up news stories about community cats, contact local animal rescue organizations, and talk to community cat caregivers and veterinarians that you work with.



Determine whether there is already a person or group advocating for your community's cats—you might be able to join forces with them. If there are people who are pushing for inhumane policies for cats, determine who they are and why they want these policies. Consider whether you might be able to work with them to develop a humane approach to cats that better meets the community's needs. Sometimes all you need to do is educate people on why certain policies are ineffective and inhumane, and offer alternatives. Other times, it will be more difficult to persuade people to make changes and adopt new approaches.

The next step is to consider types of ordinances and policies that could help feral cats.

### • How Ordinances and Policies Affect Cats

There are a range of laws at the local (city or county) level that help—or hurt—cats. Laws at the local level are generally called ordinances. This section gives you an overview of different types of policies and ordinances that might be proposed or passed in your community, and the implications that they could have for cats and their caregivers.

#### Learn more about different ordinances and policies that affect cats:

### • Trap-Neuter-Return Ordinances

Ordinances that claim to support Trap-Neuter-Return sound good—and are sometimes good—but they can be harmful for community cats. Sometimes feral cat advocates contact their local lawmakers under the mistaken impression that their community must pass a TNR ordinance. **But if feral cat caregivers are not struggling with opposition from animal control officers or hostility from neighbors, it is usually preferable not to pursue an ordinance.**

Well-intentioned ordinances, like those that may appear to support TNR, can cause more harm than good if they create regulations and restrictions—and subsequently, penalties and liabilities against caregivers and TNR providers—where there were none.

The most problematic TNR ordinance provision is mandatory registration. Mandatory registration means that feral cat caregivers are legally obligated to register with animal control or another local government agency and include personal information about themselves and sometimes even the location of the cats they care for. People who fail to register but continue to engage in TNR could be fined or even prosecuted for breaking the law.

These volunteers who open their hearts and wallets to care for cats are the core of an effective TNR program. Feral cat caregivers care for outdoor cats but are not the cats' owners. Caregivers neither create nor maintain the stray and feral cat population. Rather, they are Good Samaritans stepping forward to help the community.

Registration is not necessary for successful TNR programs. It is burdensome and time-consuming and will cause residents to cut back on neutering feral cats. Mandatory registration deters feral cat caregivers from their important volunteer work because they are apprehensive about revealing who they are and where the colonies are located. Unfortunately, their fears are well-founded. Alley Cat Allies has documented numerous instances of caregivers being subjected to verbal harassment, physical coercion, job loss, and eviction, and instances of the colonies of cats being killed.

Despite these concerns, there are some cases where TNR ordinances are needed. If feral cat caregivers in your community are already facing harassment from animal control officers or negative ordinances like feeding bans, brief ordinances that simply communicate the city's support are best.

For example, the Washington, D.C., ordinance underscores the city's commitment to TNR and does not regulate the actual practice of TNR. It states that the animal control agency "shall promote: (1) the reduction of euthanasia of animals for which medical treatment or adoption is possible; and (2) the utilization of trap, spay or neuter, and return practices as a means of controlling the feral cat population." This brief statement of the city's policy and goals is very helpful in encouraging TNR.



## Sample Trap-Neuter-Return Ordinance Provisions

If your community needs a TNR ordinance to protect caregivers from harassment and penalties, the ordinance should include these key definitions and provisions to best support cats and caregivers. These components include important protections for impounded feral cats, such as mandating the return of cats to their colony, as well as protections for caregivers.

### Definitions:

1. "Eartip" means a mark identifying a feral cat as being in a TNR program, specifically, the removal of approximately  $\frac{3}{8}$  of an inch off the tip of the cat's left ear in a straight line, while the cat is anesthetized.
2. "Feral cat" means a cat who is unsocialized to people and typically avoids contact with humans.
3. "Feral cat caregiver" means any person, who in accordance with a good faith effort to trap, neuter, vaccinate, and return the feral cat, provides volunteer care to a feral cat.
4. "Feral cat colony" means a group of feral cats who congregate, more or less, together as a unit and share a common food source.
5. "Owner" does not include a person caring for a feral cat as a feral cat caregiver.
6. "Trap-Neuter-Return/TNR" means a nonlethal approach to feral cat population control where feral cats are humanely trapped, sterilized and vaccinated, eartipped, and then returned to the location where they were originally trapped.

### Additional Provisions:

1. TNR shall be permitted, and feral cat caregivers, organizations, and animal control, are allowed to carry out TNR.
2. An eartipped feral cat received by animal services or local shelters will be returned to the location where she was trapped unless veterinary care is required. An eartipped cat trapped by animal services will be released on site unless veterinary care is required.
3. Feral cat caregivers are empowered to reclaim impounded feral cats without proof of ownership.
4. A feral cat caregiver who returns a feral cat in conjunction with TNR is not deemed to have abandoned the feral cat.

**Remember, the primary goal is to implement TNR in your community. An ordinance is only one tool among many to achieve this objective.**

## • Leash Laws: Restrictions on Outdoor Cats

Ordinances that prohibit cats from being “at large” essentially mandate that all cats be kept either indoors or on leashes. These laws are dangerous and cause more cats to be killed in pounds and shelters. That is because any cat who is outdoors—whether she is someone’s pet who is let out for a short period of time or a community cat—is subject to impoundment. Virtually 100% of all community cats impounded are killed, and 70% of all cats in pounds and shelters are killed.

Some people mistakenly believe that leash laws should be applied to cats because most cities have leash laws for dogs. However, animal control laws originated to protect humans and human property against certain damages dogs caused. Cats and dogs are distinct species, and treating them the same simply doesn’t work.

Furthermore, unowned cats such as feral cats have no owners or indoor homes. The best approach for these cats is TNR, the only way to effectively manage the feral cat population. Leash laws are incompatible with TNR.

Read more about leash laws at [www.alleycat.org/LeashLaws](http://www.alleycat.org/LeashLaws).

## • Licensing Requirements

Licensing refers to when a municipality requires cat owners to license or register their pet cat with a government agency. Like leash laws, licensing ultimately results in more cats being impounded in animal pounds and shelters, where 70% of cats impounded are killed. Licensing is particularly misleading and harmful, because it fails to achieve any of its stated goals. Furthermore, Good Samaritans who are caring for community cats might be unfairly treated as owners and be cited or bullied into stopping care.

## • Feeding Bans

Feeding bans are laws that prohibit residents from putting food outside for animals, such as pet or community cats. Feeding bans do not help stabilize community cat populations, and they undermine and discourage Trap-Neuter-Return programs, the only effective approach for stabilizing feral cat populations. With a feeding ban in place, TNR is impossible to carry out. If a community is concerned about its feral cat population, TNR is the only answer.

## • Mandatory Spay/Neuter

Alley Cat Allies strongly supports spay/neuter for pet and community cats, but mandatory spay/neuter laws are misguided and ineffective. While the impulse behind these laws is positive, such laws do little to stabilize the overall cat population. Ironically, mandatory spay/neuter laws are more detrimental than beneficial to cats. This is because such laws ignore feral and stray cats, who represent the vast majority of intact cats. Only three percent of feral and stray cats are neutered, as opposed to 82% of all pet cats.

Further complicating the issue is that in homes earning less than \$35,000 annually, only 51% of pet cats are neutered. The root of the problem is the lack of affordable spay/neuter services for pet owners and community cat caregivers. To successfully address the problem, resources should be directed toward expanding low-cost spay/neuter rather than spent administering an ineffective law.

## • Limit Laws

Some communities have laws that restrict the number of animals a person may own. These laws are intended to protect the community from unsafe or unsanitary conditions and to protect animals from inhumane treatment. Some limit laws are aimed at preventing hoarding, a psychological disorder where someone maintains more animals than he or she can adequately care for in an enclosed space.

In reality, limit laws actually increase the number of animals “euthanized” in shelters. Potential adopters should be encouraged to adopt the number of animals that they can provide a loving home for, and should not be restricted by an arbitrary number. These laws deter people from adding another member to their family.

Limit laws also become problematic for feral cat caregivers when the number of cats they care for exceeds the number of animals that a person may “own.” Limit laws should be written so that there is an exemption for feral cats and feral cat caregivers. Caregivers are not the owners of these cats and should be treated accordingly. The right way to protect the welfare of animals and public health is to address specific problematic behaviors—not to pass punitive and arbitrary laws.

## • How a Bill Becomes a Law

Legislation might seem overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be! Each city and county has a unique lawmaking process. However, these are general steps that most cities and counties follow. In addition to laws, local governments may also pass resolutions, which create policy rather than law.

1. Legislation is usually submitted by city councilmembers or county commissioners. Sometimes government staff may also introduce laws. Citizens usually cannot propose legislation on their own, but they can request a meeting with an elected official and ask them to champion a particular law.
2. After the legislation is submitted, it's then sent to the legal department for review. Sometimes it is also analyzed to determine the financial impact of the proposed law.
3. Administrative staff, sometimes the clerk, formally prepares the ordinance for introduction and assigns it a number and a date to be introduced. At this point, you can submit letters or emails stating your stance on the bill to elected officials.
4. The bill is introduced at a council or commission meeting. At this time, the council or commission may hear from the public. This is your opportunity to testify on the issue. Legislators may also discuss or debate the merits of the bill.

***See the Make an Impact section on the next page for tips on public speaking and preparing public testimony.***

5. In some communities, the bill might be voted on the same day it is introduced. In other places, the bill is considered at multiple meetings before being voted on. Alternately, a bill could first be considered in a committee that is composed of a smaller number of councilmembers. The committee may choose to pass the bill along to the full body, amend the bill, or recommend against its passage.

At any step along the way, the bill can be amended.





## 2. MAKE AN IMPACT

The most important thing you can do for cats is to be their voice in the legislative process. Whether you prefer to communicate with elected officials via phone calls, emails, letters, or office visits, you must communicate your support (or disagreement) of laws and policies that affect cats. The top priority of most elected officials is being re-elected. If they are aware that many of their constituents are paying attention to their stance on animal protection, they are more likely to vote favorably.

**In any communication with officials, remember to be polite and professional. Being rude and disrespectful toward an official will not help save cats' lives.**

### • Send Emails or Letters

Be sure to personalize your letter or email to include the legislator's full name and title. If available, also include the name or number of the proposed ordinance. If that information is not available, clearly identify the issue in the first paragraph. Remember to send a letter to every elected official. If there are six councilmembers, you should send six personalized letters.

*See pages 19 to 23 of the Resources section for sample letters on the various laws that affect cats.*

### • Face to Face: Schedule a Meeting

Many legislators are willing to meet with their constituents. Call ahead to schedule an appointment. If the legislator is unavailable to meet, it is still helpful to meet with a legislative aide or assistant. Their job is to take notes and report back to the legislator.

#### Before the Meeting

- Outline what you want to say beforehand. Your message should be as short and simple as possible. Legislators are human beings like everyone else and often have short attention spans. But still include a short anecdote about how this issue will personally affect you. For example, if you care for a cat colony and have spent your own time and money sterilizing and caring for them, tell your legislator.
- Prepare a one page fact sheet to give to the legislator. Include any available local statistics that support your position on the legislation. If possible, include how the legislation would affect the city or county budget.
- Dress for success. It may seem minor, but officials will take your views more seriously if you are dressed professionally.

*See pages 19 to 23 of the Resources section for sample letters on each ordinance, which you can review to prepare for your meeting.*

### **During the Meeting**

- At the beginning of the meeting, identify yourself, where you live, and the issue you are there to discuss.
- State whether you oppose or support the measure being considered and list a few points in support of your stance. Refer to your outline to stay on point.
- Give the legislator a copy of the fact sheet.
- Be friendly and polite. Even if you think the legislator is being rude, ignoring you, or openly admits to not caring about animals, always stay calm and respectful. You don't want to get a reputation for being unreasonable or rude.
- Ask the legislator what his or her stance on the specific issue is and why. If the legislator disagrees with you or says he or she hasn't made up his or her mind yet, ask what the concerns are. Address the concerns calmly and politely.
- Thank the legislator for meeting with you.

### **After the Meeting**

- Follow up! Email or mail a brief note thanking the legislator for meeting with you and reiterating your key points.

For a more in-depth look at conducting meetings with decision makers, go to [www.alleycat.org/DecisionMakers](http://www.alleycat.org/DecisionMakers).

## **• Speak Out! Public Speaking and Testimony**

Before an ordinance is passed, the city council or county commission will hold a hearing to discuss its merits. This is your chance to speak out for cats and explain why you oppose or support the ordinance. Follow the city's or county's instructions about testifying. Some places require people who want to testify to sign up beforehand. You can call the city clerk or look online to find out the procedure in your particular area.

Dress professionally. An exception to this is if you are with a large crowd wearing a matching article of clothing (like an orange T-shirt) to signify support for cats. Be sure to alert the council during your testimony why all these people are dressed a certain way. You could also ask everyone there in support to stand up so the council can see how many people are on your side.

### **Prepare Testimony**

Keep your remarks short, to the point, and clear. Start by introducing yourself and stating where you are from. State your affiliations with any groups or whether you are a caregiver of feral cats or an owner of an adopted animal.

List the three main reasons to support or oppose the ordinance. Tell a short anecdote demonstrating the good work you do or why you care about the issue. End by summarizing your main points and thanking the legislators for listening.

You can write out bullet points or the entirety of your testimony depending on your comfort level with public speaking.

***See page 25 in the Resources section for sample testimony.***

## 3. GROW THE CAUSE

### • Organize Your Community

Your legislators must get a sense that many people in the community want humane policies for cats. There is great political strength in our standing together—with one voice—to say that we need policies that protect the lives of cats.

Start out by networking with other people who have done similar campaigns or other undertakings. Check out our Feral Friends Network to find and network with other groups and people in your area: [www.alleycat.org/FeralFriends](http://www.alleycat.org/FeralFriends).

You might also approach leaders of other local community groups that do not focus on animal issues and ask them about the best ways to get things done in your community. They may also be able to help you set up appointments with the decision makers who you will need to meet with to effect change in your area.

You might even consider starting your own organization. Organizing as a group provides shared resources, a safety net for both cats and caregivers, and a protected legal identity. Learn more about starting your own organization at [www.alleycat.org/StartAnOrg](http://www.alleycat.org/StartAnOrg).

For a more in-depth look at grassroots organizing, please refer to [www.alleycat.org/Organizing](http://www.alleycat.org/Organizing).

### • Reach Out

After you've sent your own email or letter to your legislator, reach out to like-minded residents who are also constituents of the legislator to ask them to join you in taking action. Send out an "action alert," an email asking others to take action.

Email your friends and family asking them to join you in taking action, and ask them to forward the email on to their own contacts. If you are already part of a local animal protection organization, ask the organization to send an email to its supporters alerting them to the proposed legislation and asking them to contact their legislators.

***See page 24 of the Resources section for a sample email asking people to take action.***



## 4. MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

### • Take it to the Media

Media coverage is one of the best ways to draw attention and support to your efforts to secure humane policies for cats in your community. Unlike advertising, you have limited control in a news story over how you or your organization is portrayed—but the coverage and recognition are free.

There are steps you can take to manage all of your interactions with the media to generate the best outcomes and coverage possible. You can control the message. The trick is to be prepared. Before any media interview, be prepared with three key talking points (see sample talking points in the following bullet point).

Writing op-eds and letters to the editor are great advocacy tools and can help get the word out to your community. When writing opinion pieces, make sure to check the local paper for their guidelines, including word count, deadlines, and where to send it—and follow them. In your writing, focus on the issues that really matter and the compelling information that might change minds. Stay positive and not overly emotional, and use statistics when available. Read Alley Cat Allies' Guide to Working with the Media at [www.alleycat.org/PublicityGuide](http://www.alleycat.org/PublicityGuide).

*See page 26 of the Resources section for a sample letter to the editor.*

### • What to Say: Talking Points

#### Feral Cats

- A feral cat is a cat who has either never had any contact with people or her contact with people has diminished over time. She is not socialized to people and lives on her own outdoors. Feral cats are just as healthy as pet cats, according to veterinary studies.
- Feral cat caregivers do not create or maintain the feral cat population.

#### Trap-Neuter-Return

- Trap-Neuter-Return is the only effective approach for feral cats. Feral cats are humanely trapped, spayed/neutered, vaccinated, and eartipped (the universal symbol of a neutered and vaccinated cat), and then returned to their outdoor home.
- Attempts at permanently removing cats from an area (i.e. catching and killing) are futile because of the vacuum effect. The vacuum effect is what happens when even a portion of an animal population is removed from its home range and more animals move in to take advantage of the resources.

#### Restrictive TNR Ordinances

- The most successful TNR ordinances are those that are simple.
- Onerous provisions like mandatory registration will only deter people from neutering feral cats.
- Feral cat caregivers are volunteers who should not be penalized for helping their community.
- Feral cat caregivers did not create the stray and feral cat population, and these cats will continue to breed unless someone steps in to spay/neuter and vaccinate them.

#### Leash Laws

- Leash laws result in more cats being killed in our shelters because any outdoor cat could be impounded. More than 70% of all cats impounded in pounds and shelters are killed. Virtually 100% of impounded feral cats are killed.
- Leash laws are deadly for feral cats. The best approach for feral cats is Trap-Neuter-Return, the only way to effectively manage the feral cat population.



## COMMON LICENSING MYTHS:

### Licensing reunites lost cats with owners.

**FALSE.** Nationally, only 2% of impounded cats are reunited with their owners, according to the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy. In a study of San Diego shelters, “the worst spike in euthanasia we found was L.A. County, where cats reclaimed fell 32 percent the year they instituted cat licensing.”

### Licensing generates revenue for the community.

**FALSE.** The cost of running a licensing program often exceeds the revenue the programs generate. Compliance rates are notoriously low, and by its nature, licensing increases the number of cats picked up by animal control and brought to shelters. As a result, the number of cats killed increases, and taxpayers are forced to foot the bill.

### Licensing ensures cats are spayed/neutered and vaccinated against rabies.

**FALSE.** The only way to ensure an animal is spayed/neutered is to directly spay/neuter the animal. Licensing wastes funds on enforcement and rounding up unlicensed animals rather than directing it where it's needed most: to run low-cost spay/neuter programs. Studies show that the main reason people don't spay/neuter their pets is because of the cost of the procedure and lack of access to clinics. Adding licensing fees on top of veterinary costs is likely to discourage spaying/neutering rather than encourage it, and is another reason licensing compliance rates are so low.

Licensing is also impractical because one of the only ways to visually distinguish a licensed cat from an unlicensed cat is a tag on the cat's collar. Many cats do not tolerate collars, and those who wear them can easily lose them; nearly all cat collars today are designed to break away easily to prevent strangulation. Yet any cat not wearing a collar—owned or unowned, licensed or unlicensed, socialized or feral—is a visible target for impoundment by animal control.

### Licensing Requirements

- Licensing is a waste of money and is ineffective. It doesn't reunite lost cats with owners, generate revenue for the community, or ensure that animals are spayed or neutered.
- Licensing results in more cats being killed in our shelters because unlicensed cats may be impounded.
- Feral cats have no owners to license them. The best approach for feral cats is Trap-Neuter-Return, the only way to effectively manage the feral cat population.

### Feeding Bans

- Feeding bans are ineffective and lack scientific support. They do not decrease the number of wild animals or feral cats in an area.
- Feeding bans are counterproductive and discourage Trap-Neuter-Return, which is the only effective method of stabilizing feral cat populations.
- Cats are territorial and bond to their surroundings. There are always other food sources available.
- Caregivers who set out food for cats should not be punished for improving conditions for the cats and the community.
- Feeding bans ignore the real problem—the lack of affordable spay/neuter services in the community.

### Mandatory Spay/Neuter

- The primary reason that people do not spay or neuter their pet is cost. The only way to increase the number of animals spayed or neutered in our community is to expand low-cost spay and neuter resources.
- Mandatory spay/neuter deters people from practicing Trap-Neuter-Return out of fear that they will be penalized while in the process of spaying/neutering the full colony.

**Check out Alley Cat Allies' Frequently Asked Questions for more information about feral cats:**  
[www.alleycat.org/FAQ](http://www.alleycat.org/FAQ).

### • Responding to Opponents

Many of the people who disagree with your position will ask questions that make it clear that they don't understand the issue. The first part of the answer to almost any question is that catching and killing feral cats has failed, and TNR is the only way to go.

Some people will try to get you to “prove” that feral cats are healthy and safe community members. But the onus should be on them to defend the cycle of catching and killing, which all evidence indicates has failed.

Some people are under the mistaken impression that there is a choice between having cats in their neighborhoods and not having cats. But it's not a choice. If catching and killing cats had worked, we would not need to address these issues. Communities have caught and killed feral cats for decades at great expense to taxpayers and with no success. A new online resource that explains this is [www.CommonSenseForCats.com](http://www.CommonSenseForCats.com).

The fact is, feral cats who already exist in neighborhoods can either be spayed or neutered, stabilizing the population and decreasing the unwanted behaviors associated with mating, or they can be unsterilized and continue to breed. You do not have a choice between cats or no cats. Your only choice is what kind of cats you will have and how many of them there will be. Here are two reasons that Trap-Neuter-Return is the best approach for cats and communities:

### **Killing Cats Does Not Help Birds**

The most vocal opponents of Trap-Neuter-Return have traditionally been wildlife or bird advocates because they mistakenly believe that the continued killing of cats will protect birds. But the mass killing of one species in an attempt to save another is never the answer. Killing colonies of cats simply opens up a void where new cats quickly move in and breed back to capacity. This is called the Vacuum Effect ([www.alleycat.org/VacuumEffect](http://www.alleycat.org/VacuumEffect)). Trying to protect birds by focusing on cats wastes resources and confuses the issue. Animal advocates interested in protecting birds must concentrate on the devastating impact that humans have on bird populations because of habitat loss and destruction.

### **Sanctuaries are Not Effective**

Some opponents of Trap-Neuter-Return have realized that advocating for the killing of cats is not palatable to the vast majority of Americans. In an attempt to muddy the issue, opponents might suggest that feral cats be placed in "sanctuaries" instead. Sanctuaries are not an answer to feral cats. Sanctuaries are extremely expensive to build and maintain. Furthermore, they can only handle a tiny percentage of the cats already living in the community. The remaining cats will continue to reproduce without a Trap-Neuter-Return program in place. Simply put, sanctuaries are the most costly and least effective approach to feral cats. Don't let Trap-Neuter-Return opponents convince local officials that sanctuaries are anything more than a pipe dream. Learn more about sanctuaries: [www.alleycat.org/Sanctuaries](http://www.alleycat.org/Sanctuaries).

Your goal is to save cats' lives, but others may have entirely different goals. Determine what is most important to them, and explain the benefits of the ordinance or policy in terms that are relevant to them. For example, to some officials, the most important issue may be money. If it is an election year, they may be concerned about their image. If you are working with the public health department, their focus may be rabies and other diseases. Point out the facts that matter to them: this approach is often less expensive in the long run; this approach will generate positive media coverage and community support; this approach improves the health of cats, and rabies vaccination are a central component of Trap-Neuter-Return.



JASON PUTSCHE

## 5. RESOURCES

### • Sample Letters to Legislators

#### Letter on Licensing

[Date]  
[Official's Name]  
[Official's Address]

Dear \_\_\_\_:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I have lived in \_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_ years. I am writing to express my concern with the \_\_\_\_ (city council/ commission)'s consideration of a licensing requirement for cats. Placing a new tax on cat owners is not the way to help cats or our community.

The most serious problem with licensing is that it will increase the number of cats impounded in our area shelters and pounds, where many cats are killed. Furthermore, licensing will not accomplish any of the stated goals.

- (1) Licensing does not return cats to their owners. Nationally, only 2% of impounded cats are reunited with their owners, according to the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy. In Los Angeles County, the number of cats reclaimed fell 32% the year they instituted cat licensing.
- (2) Licensing does not generate revenue. Just running a licensing program is expensive and often exceeds the revenue created by licensing. Furthermore, very few people comply with licensing requirements. Instead, cats will remain unlicensed but the number of cats impounded by animal control will increase. Taxpayers will be forced to foot the bill for the care and eventual "euthanasia" of these cats.
- (3) Licensing does not ensure spaying/neutering or vaccinations. The best way to increase the number of animals who are spayed/neutered is to directly spay/neuter them. Studies have found that the primary reason that people don't sterilize their pet is cost. Adding a licensing fee to the cost of sterilization will only discourage these people from seeking veterinary care.

Finally, this law is incompatible with Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). TNR is the only humane and effective way to reduce the feral cat population. Feral cats are the same species as pet cats, but feral cats are not adoptable because they are not socialized to people. Through TNR, cats are humanely trapped, neutered, and vaccinated and returned to their outdoor homes. The feral cat population stabilizes and decreases. Cats who have gone through TNR do not have owners and will remain unlicensed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

### **Letter on Trap-Neuter-Return**

[Date]  
[Official's Name]  
[Official's Address]

Dear \_\_\_\_:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I have lived in \_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_ years. I am writing to state my support for Trap-Neuter-Return. Through TNR, cats are humanely trapped, neutered, vaccinated, eartipped for identification, and returned to their outdoor homes. TNR is the only humane and effective way to stabilize the feral cat population.

I am involved in the following ways in conducting TNR in our community: \_\_\_\_\_.

Feral cats are the same species as pet cats, but feral cats are not adoptable. "Feral" means that the cats are not socialized to people and generally avoid contact with humans. Through TNR, these unadoptable cats are neutered and vaccinated. As a result, the feral cat population stabilizes and decreases. TNR makes feral cats healthier and ends the breeding cycle, which means no more kittens. It also ends mating behaviors including yowling, fighting, spraying, and roaming. Feral cats in TNR programs are just as healthy as pet cats. They receive vaccinations and ongoing management from generous volunteers.

More and more communities are embracing TNR. The following nearby communities already practice TNR: \_\_\_\_\_. According to a recent study by Alley Cat Allies, more than 340 cities and counties participate in TNR. They have adopted TNR because the old way of doing things, catching and killing cats, has failed to address the feral cat population.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

### **Letter on Leash Laws**

[Date]  
[Official's Name]  
[Official's Address]

Dear \_\_\_\_:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I have lived in \_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_ years. I am writing to express my concern with the \_\_\_\_ (city council/commission)'s consideration of a leash law for outdoor cats. In addition to increasing costs for the city, this new law will lead to more cats being killed in the local shelters and pounds where, already, a high number of cats are being killed.

This law will threaten any cat outside with impoundment, even those who are already spayed and neutered. If cats may be impounded and killed just for being outdoors, no one will be willing to invest the time, energy, and money to spay/neuter these cats.

This law is unfair to citizens who own outdoor-only or indoor/outdoor cats. Most of these citizens have already done the right thing by having their cat spayed or neutered. Under this law, their cats would be forced to live their lives indoors or face death.

If the goal is to reduce the number of cats "euthanized" in our shelters and pounds, consider supporting Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) or programs that partially or fully subsidize spay/neuter services.

Trap-Neuter-Return is the only humane and effective way to stabilize the feral cat population. Feral cats are the same species as pet cats, but feral cats are not adoptable. Feral cats are not socialized to people and generally avoid contact with humans. Under TNR, cats are humanely trapped, neutered, and vaccinated and returned to their outdoor homes. The feral cat population stabilizes and decreases over time. Leash laws are incompatible with TNR.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

### Letter on Feeding Bans

[Date]  
[Official's Name]  
[Official's Address]

Dear \_\_\_\_:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I have lived in \_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_ years. I am writing to urge the \_\_\_\_ (city council/commission) not to pass a feeding ban. Feeding bans are counterproductive because they undermine the only successful method of addressing the feral cat population, Trap-Neuter-Return.

Feeding bans will not decrease the feral cat population. There are always other food sources in populated areas. Cats are territorial, bonded to their surroundings, and will not leave simply because compassionate people can no longer legally feed them. A feeding ban will result in cats roaming farther to find food. It can actually increase calls to animal control.

If \_\_\_\_ (name of town) wants to stabilize the feral cat population, Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the only humane and effective solution. Feral cats are the same species as pet cats, but feral cats are not adoptable because they are not socialized to people. Through TNR, cats are humanely trapped, neutered, and vaccinated and returned to their outdoor homes. The feral cat population stabilizes and decreases.

Feeding bans do not allow Trap-Neuter-Return to be carried out. The cats in our community will continue to have kittens, and the feral cat population will increase. Please do not punish the Good Samaritans in \_\_\_\_ [Name of Town] who spend their own time and money to carry out TNR and find homes for adoptable kittens.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

### Letter on Mandatory Spay/Neuter

[Date]  
[Official's Name]  
[Official's Address]

Dear \_\_\_\_:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I have lived in \_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_ years. I am writing to urge the \_\_\_\_ [City Council/Commission] not to pass a mandatory spay/neuter law. Such a law will not increase the number of sterilized animals in our community. Rather than spend more money on administering and enforcing another law, please consider expanding low-cost spay/neuter resources instead.

I agree wholeheartedly that dogs and cats should be sterilized. However, there is no evidence that these laws are effective. In homes where the income was \$35,000 or higher, almost all cats, 93%, were neutered. Almost 75% of unneutered cats live in homes where the income is less than \$35,000. If you pass a mandatory spay/neuter law, you will be targeting people who are the least equipped to comply with it.

The second issue with mandatory spay/neuter laws is that the vast majority of the unsterilized animals in our area are feral and stray cats. Only three percent of feral and stray cats are neutered as opposed to 82% of all pet cats, according to a study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. These animals do not have owners and this law will not reach them. Instead, it will just discourage the Good Samaritans who currently care for stray and feral cats, leading to fewer cats being neutered overall. If you want to reduce the number of animals entering our shelters, please expand spay/neuter resources. Don't penalize the people working hardest on behalf of these animals.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

## • Sample Action Alert

### **Subject line: Speak out for our community's cats!**

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to ask you to join me in supporting a proposed ordinance that would approve Trap-Neuter-Return for feral cats in our community. Trap-Neuter-Return is the only humane and effective approach to feral cats. Please take a few minutes to email members of the \_\_\_\_\_ [City Council/Commissioners] urging them to support this legislation.

Animal control's traditional approach to feral cats, catch and kill, is cruel, endless, and costly.

Please take action today. Join me in letting our legislators know that we want humane policies for our community's cats!

In your letter, mention that you are a constituent who cares about our community's cats, and that you support TNR as the best approach to feral cats.

Here are a few talking points for your letter:

- Trap-Neuter-Return is the only effective approach for feral cats. Feral cats are humanely trapped, spayed/neutered, vaccinated, and eartipped (the universal symbol of a neutered and vaccinated cat), and then returned to their outdoor home.
- Attempting to permanently remove cats from an area (i.e. catching and killing) is futile because of the vacuum effect. The vacuum effect is what happens when even a portion of an animal population is removed from its home range.

When you're ready, send your email to:

[Contact Names and Email Addresses]

Thank you for speaking out for animals in our community!

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

## • Sample Public Testimony

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a resident of \_\_\_\_\_.

First, I want to thank \_\_\_\_\_ and the council for allowing this dialogue. I am a strong supporter of Trap-Neuter-Return because it is the only effective approach to cat management.

I'd like to use this time to briefly explain some of the science behind feral cat populations. First and foremost, feral cats will always exist. Some people are under the mistaken impression that there is a choice between having cats in their neighborhoods and not having cats.

Catching and killing cats has failed for decades. It does not decrease feral cat populations.

Trap-Neuter-Return does effectively stabilize feral cat populations. Under TNR, cats are humanely trapped, neutered, vaccinated, eartipped for identification, and returned to their outdoor homes. TNR improves feral cats' lives and ends the breeding cycle, which means no more kittens. It also ends mating behaviors including yowling, fighting, spraying, and roaming.

Colonies that are involved in TNR diminish in size over time. During an 11-year study of TNR at the University of Florida, the number of cats declined by 66% with no new kittens being born after the first four years of operation. A very successful TNR program in Jacksonville, Fla., has spayed/neutered 20,000 cats since 2008, and as a result, the number of cats killed in the city's shelter decreased nearly 60%.

More and more communities are embracing TNR. According to a recent study by Alley Cat Allies, more than 340 cities and counties participate in TNR. Outdoor cats have been part of our landscape for thousands of years, and always will be.

I urge you to support TNR in our community.

Thank you.

## • Sample Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

Our community leaders should encourage Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) for feral cats in our community—it's a win for the cats and for their human neighbors. Trap-Neuter-Return improves the lives of the cats, and addresses community concerns. Animal control's traditional method, catch and kill, is cruel, endless, and costly.

Under TNR, cats are humanely trapped, neutered, vaccinated, eartipped for identification, and returned to their outdoor homes. Trap-Neuter-Return makes feral cats healthier and ends the breeding cycle, which means no more kittens. It also ends mating behaviors including yowling, fighting, spraying, and roaming.

More and more communities are embracing TNR. According to a recent study by Alley Cat Allies, more than 340 cities and counties participate in TNR. Outdoor cats have been part of our landscape for thousands of years, and always will be. I urge residents to write to \_\_\_\_\_ (city council/commission) to voice your support for Trap-Neuter-Return in our community.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]  
[Address]  
[Phone Number]  
[Email Address]





7920 Norfolk Avenue, Suite 600  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
[www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)

© 2014