



RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

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January 31, 2024

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.
Chairman
House Committee on Judiciary
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 7075 An Act Relating to Animals and Animal Husbandry – Cruelty to Animals

Dear Chairman Craven,

Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) the opportunity to comment on H 7075, which would provide that the trapping and subsequent release of any unowned feral or free roaming cat for the purpose of spaying or neutering of the cat shall not be considered abandonment. DEM has concerns with this legislation in its current form.


DEM is grateful that the sponsor of this bill has recognized that under existing law, any person or group that practices Trap, Neuter, and Release (TNR) as an attempted method to control the population of free-roaming or feral cats may be in jeopardy of criminal prosecution under the animal abandonment statutes. While the efficacy of TNR may be the subject of some debate, the fact is that those who are attempting to address the issue of unowned, free-roaming, and/or feral cats through the practice of TNR should not be subject to animal abandonment laws, as is possible under current law.

DEM's concern with this legislation is that it does not include protections for private property owners that were included in previous iterations of the bill. As currently written, the bill would open the door for individuals or groups practicing TNR to trap cats on private property without the permission of the property owner. Similar legislation introduced in past years included language requiring written permission from the property owner to trap cats and we urge the committee to restore this language.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and would be pleased to make ourselves available as needed. Please feel free to contact Scott Marshall, DVM (RI State

Veterinarian) at scott.marshall@dem.ri.gov should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terrence Gray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "T".

Terrence Gray, P.E.
Director

cc: Members of the House Committee on Judiciary
The Honorable John G. Edwards
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, House Policy Director