

Chapter 19A.

Protection of Animals.

Article 1.

Civil Remedy for Protection of Animals.

§ 19A-1. Definitions.

The following definitions apply in this Article:

- (1) The term "animals" includes every living vertebrate in the classes Amphibia, Reptilia, Aves, and Mammalia except human beings.
- (2) The terms "cruelty" and "cruel treatment" include every act, omission, or neglect whereby unjustifiable physical pain, suffering, or death is caused or permitted.
- (3) The term "person" has the same meaning as in G.S. 12-3. (1969, c. 831; 1979, c. 808, s. 2; 1995, c. 509, s. 19; 2003-208, s. 1.)

§ 19A-1.1. Exemptions.

This Article shall not apply to the following:

- (1) The lawful taking of animals under the jurisdiction and regulation of the Wildlife Resources Commission, except that this Article applies to those birds other than pigeons exempted by the Wildlife Resources Commission from its definition of "wild birds" pursuant to G.S. 113-129(15a).
- (2) Lawful activities conducted for purposes of biomedical research or training or for purposes of production of livestock, poultry, or aquatic species.
- (3) Lawful activities conducted for the primary purpose of providing food for human or animal consumption.
- (4) Activities conducted for lawful veterinary purposes.
- (5) The lawful destruction of any animal for the purposes of protecting the public, other animals, or the public health.
- (6) Lawful activities for sport.
- (7) The taking and holding in captivity of a wild animal by a licensed sportsman for use or display in an annual, seasonal, or cultural event, so long as the animal is captured from the wild and returned to the wild at or near the area where it was captured. (2003-208, s. 1; 2013-3, s. 3; 2015-286, s. 4.32(b).)

§ 19A-2. Purpose.

It shall be the purpose of this Article to provide a civil remedy for the protection and humane treatment of animals in addition to any criminal remedies that are available and it shall be proper in any action to combine causes of action against one or more defendants for the protection of one or more animals. A real party in interest as plaintiff shall be held to include any person even though the person does not have a possessory or ownership right in an animal; a real party in interest as defendant shall include any person who owns or has possession of an animal. Venue for any action filed under this Article shall only be in the county where any violation is alleged to have occurred. (1969, c. 831; 1995, c. 509, s. 20; 2003-208, s. 1; 2013-3, s. 4; 2013-410, s. 4.1.)

§ 19A-3. Preliminary injunction; care of animal pending hearing on the merits.

(a) Upon the filing of a verified complaint in the district court in the county in which cruelty to an animal has allegedly occurred, the judge may, as a matter of discretion, issue a preliminary injunction in accordance with the procedures set forth in G.S. 1A-1, Rule 65. Every such preliminary injunction, if the plaintiff so requests, may give the plaintiff the right to provide suitable care for the animal. If it appears on the face of the complaint that the condition giving rise to the cruel treatment of an animal requires the animal to be removed from its owner or other person who possesses it, then it shall be proper for the court in the preliminary injunction to allow the plaintiff to take possession of the animal as custodian.

(b) The plaintiff as custodian may employ a veterinarian to provide necessary medical care for the animal without any additional court order. Prior to taking such action, the plaintiff as custodian shall consult with, or attempt to consult with, the defendant in the action, but the plaintiff as custodian may authorize such care without the defendant's consent. Notwithstanding the provisions of this subsection, the plaintiff as custodian may not have an animal euthanized without written consent of the defendant or a court order that authorizes euthanasia upon the court's finding that the animal is suffering due to terminal illness or terminal injury.

(c) The plaintiff as custodian may place an animal with a foster care provider. The foster care provider shall return the animal to the plaintiff as custodian on demand. (1969, c. 831; 1971, c. 528, s. 10; 1979, c. 808, s. 3; 2003-208, s. 1; 2006-113, s. 1.1.)

§ 19A-4. Permanent injunction.

(a) In accordance with G.S. 1A-1, Rule 65, a district court judge in the county in which the original action was brought shall determine the merits of the action by trial without a jury, and upon hearing such evidence as may be presented, shall enter orders as the court deems appropriate, including a permanent injunction and dismissal of the action along with dissolution of any preliminary injunction that had been issued.

(b) If the plaintiff prevails, the court in its discretion may include the costs of food, water, shelter, and care, including medical care, provided to the animal, less any amounts deposited by the defendant under G.S. 19A-70, as part of the costs allowed to the plaintiff under G.S. 6-18. In addition, if the court finds by a preponderance of the evidence that even if a permanent injunction were issued there would exist a substantial risk that the animal would be subjected to further cruelty if returned to the possession of the defendant, the court may terminate the defendant's ownership and right of possession of the animal and transfer ownership and right of possession to the plaintiff or other appropriate successor owner. For good cause shown, the court may also enjoin the defendant from acquiring new animals for a specified period of time or limit the number of animals the defendant may own or possess during a specified period of time.

(c) If the final judgment entitles the defendant to regain possession of the animal, the custodian shall return the animal, including taking any necessary steps to retrieve the animal from a foster care provider.

(d) The court shall consider and may provide for custody and care of the animal until the time to appeal expires or all appeals have been exhausted. (1969, c. 831; 1971, c. 528, s. 10; 1979, c. 808, s. 4; 2003-208, s. 1; 2006-113, s. 1.2.)

§§ 19A-5 through 19A-9. Reserved for future codification purposes.

Article 2.

Protection of Black Bears.

§ 19A-10. Unlawful to buy, sell or enclose (except as provided) black bear.

Except as otherwise provided in applicable statutes, it shall be unlawful for any person to buy or sell black bears or for any person, firm or corporation to possess or keep any black bear (*Ursus americanus*) in any enclosure, pen, cage, or other place or means of captivity except as hereinafter provided. (1975, c. 56, s. 1.)

§ 19A-11. Inapplicable to bona fide zoos, etc.

The provisions of this Article shall not apply to bona fide zoos which are operated by federal, State, or local governmental agencies, or to educational institutions in which black bears are kept or exhibited as part of a bona fide course of training or research in the natural sciences, or to black bears held without caging under conditions simulating a natural habitat, the development of which is in accord with plans and specifications developed by the holder and approved by the Wildlife Resources Commission. (1975, c. 56, s. 2.)

§ 19A-12. Possession of black bear on July 1, 1975; surrender of bear; modification of facilities; forfeiture.

Any person, firm or corporation in possession of a black bear on July 1, 1975, under an existing permit issued by the Wildlife Resources Commission, where the conditions under which such black bear is held are in violation of this Article, may immediately surrender such black bear and such permit to the Wildlife Resources Commission which shall compensate such person, firm or corporation in the amount actually paid for such bear not to exceed the sum of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) for any one bear. In lieu of surrendering such black bear and such permit, any such person, firm or corporation may give immediately written notice to the Wildlife Resources Commission that plans and specifications for facilities to hold such bear without caging under conditions simulating a natural habitat will be submitted to the Commission for approval within 30 days thereafter. In the event such plans and specifications are not submitted within the time thus limited, or they are disapproved by the Commission, or the facilities are not completed in accordance therewith within 60 days after approval by the Commission, continued possession of a black bear by such person, firm or corporation after any of such events shall constitute a violation of the provisions of this Article, and any such black bear shall be forfeited to the Wildlife Resources Commission without compensation. (1975, c. 56, s. 3.)

§ 19A-13. Violation of Article.

Violation of the provisions of this Article shall constitute a Class 2 misdemeanor. (1975, c. 56, s. 4; 1993, c. 539, s. 314; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c).)

§ 19A-14. Enforcement of Article.

Law-enforcement officers of the Wildlife Resources Commission and all other peace officers are authorized and empowered to enforce the provisions of this Article. (1975, c. 56, s. 5.)

§§ 19A-15 through 19A-19. Reserved for future codification purposes.

Article 3.

Animal Welfare Act.

§ 19A-20. Title of Article.

This Article may be cited as the Animal Welfare Act. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 1.)

§ 19A-21. Purposes.

The purposes of this Article are (i) to protect the owners of dogs and cats from the theft of such pets; (ii) to prevent the sale or use of stolen pets; (iii) to insure that animals, as items of commerce, are provided humane care and treatment by regulating the transportation, sale, purchase, housing, care, handling and treatment of such animals by persons or organizations engaged in transporting, buying, or selling them for such use; (iv) to insure that animals confined in pet shops, kennels, animal shelters and auction markets are provided humane care and treatment; (v) to prohibit the sale, trade or adoption of those animals which show physical signs of infection, communicable disease, or congenital abnormalities, unless veterinary care is assured subsequent to sale, trade or adoption. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 2.)

§ 19A-22. Animal Welfare Section in Animal Health Division of Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services created; Director.

There is hereby created within the Animal Health Division of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, a new section thereof, to be known as the Animal Welfare Section of said division.

The Commissioner of Agriculture is hereby authorized to appoint a Director of said section whose duties and authority shall be determined by the Commissioner subject to the approval of the Board of Agriculture and subject to the provisions of this Article. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 3; 1997-261, s. 1.)

§ 19A-23. Definitions.

For the purposes of this Article, the following terms, when used in the Article or the rules or orders made pursuant thereto, shall be construed respectively to mean:

- (1) "Adequate feed" means the provision at suitable intervals, not to exceed 24 hours, of a quantity of wholesome foodstuff suitable for the species and age, sufficient to maintain a reasonable level of nutrition in each animal. Such foodstuff shall be served in a sanitized receptacle, dish, or container.
- (2) "Adequate water" means a constant access to a supply of clean, fresh, potable water provided in a sanitary manner or provided at suitable intervals for the species and not to exceed 24 hours at any interval.
- (3) "Ambient temperature" means the temperature surrounding the animal.
- (4) "Animal" means any domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*), or domestic cat (*Felis domestica*).
- (5) "Animal shelter" means a facility which is used to house or contain seized, stray, homeless, quarantined, abandoned or unwanted animals and which is under contract with, owned, operated, or maintained by a county, city, town, or other municipality, or by a duly incorporated humane society, animal welfare society, society for the prevention of cruelty to animals, or other nonprofit organization devoted to the welfare, protection, rehabilitation, or humane treatment of animals.
- (5a) "Approved foster care provider" means an individual, nonprofit corporation, or association that cares for stray animals that has been favorably assessed by the operator of the animal shelter through the application of written standards.

- (5b) "Approved rescue organization" means a nonprofit corporation or association that cares for stray animals that has been favorably assessed by the operator of the animal shelter through the application of written standards.
- (5c) "Boarding kennel" means a facility or establishment which regularly offers to the public the service of boarding dogs or cats or both for a fee. Such a facility or establishment may, in addition to providing shelter, food and water, offer grooming or other services for dogs and/or cats.
- (6) "Commissioner" means the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of North Carolina.
- (7) "Dealer" means any person who sells, exchanges, or donates, or offers to sell, exchange, or donate animals to another dealer, pet shop, or research facility; provided, however, that an individual who breeds and raises on his own premises no more than the offspring of five canine or feline females per year, unless bred and raised specifically for research purposes shall not be considered to be a dealer for the purposes of this Article.
- (8) "Director" means the Director of the Animal Welfare Section of the Animal Health Division of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
- (9) "Euthanasia" means the humane destruction of an animal accomplished by a method that involves rapid unconsciousness and immediate death or by a method that involves anesthesia, produced by an agent which causes painless loss of consciousness, and death during such loss of consciousness.
- (10) "Housing facility" means any room, building, or area used to contain a primary enclosure or enclosures.
- (11) "Person" means any individual, partnership, firm, joint-stock company, corporation, association, trust, estate, or other legal entity.
- (12) "Pet shop" means a person or establishment that acquires for the purposes of resale animals bred by others whether as owner, agent, or on consignment, and that sells, trades or offers to sell or trade such animals to the general public at retail or wholesale.
- (13) "Primary enclosure" means any structure used to immediately restrict an animal or animals to a limited amount of space, such as a room, pen, cage compartment or hutch.
- (14) "Public auction" means any place or location where dogs or cats are sold at auction to the highest bidder regardless of whether such dogs or cats are offered as individuals, as a group, or by weight.
- (15) "Research facility" means any place, laboratory, or institution at which scientific tests, experiments, or investigations involving the use of living animals are carried out, conducted, or attempted.
- (16) "Sanitize" means to make physically clean and to remove and destroy to a practical minimum, agents injurious to health. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 4; 1979, c. 734, s. 1; 1987, c. 827, s. 61; 1997-261, s. 2; 2005-276, s. 11.5(a); 2013-377, s. 1.)

§ 19A-24. Powers of Board of Agriculture.

- (a) The Board of Agriculture shall:

- (1) Establish standards for the care of animals at animal shelters, boarding kennels, pet shops, and public auctions. A boarding kennel that offers dog day care services and has a ratio of dogs to employees or supervisors, or both employees and supervisors, of not more than 10 to one, shall not as to such services be subject to any regulations that restrict the number of dogs that are permitted within any primary enclosure.
- (2) Prescribe the manner in which animals may be transported to and from registered or licensed premises.
- (3) Require licensees and holders of certificates to keep records of the purchase and sale of animals and to identify animals at their establishments.
- (4) Adopt rules to implement this Article, including federal regulations promulgated under Title 7, Chapter 54, of the United States Code.
- (5) Adopt rules on the euthanasia of animals in the possession or custody of any person required to obtain a certificate of registration under this Article. An animal shall only be put to death by a method and delivery of method approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Humane Society of the United States, or the American Humane Association. The Department shall establish rules for the euthanasia process using any one or combination of methods and standards prescribed by the three aforementioned organizations. The rules shall address the equipment, the process, and the separation of animals, in addition to the animals' age and condition. If the gas method of euthanasia is approved, rules shall require (i) that only commercially compressed carbon monoxide gas is approved for use, and (ii) that the gas must be delivered in a commercially manufactured chamber that allows for the individual separation of animals. Rules shall also mandate training for any person who participates in the euthanasia process.

(b) In addition to rules on the euthanasia of animals adopted pursuant to subdivision (5) of subsection (a) of this section, the Board of Agriculture shall adopt rules for the certification of euthanasia technicians. The rules may provide for:

- (1) Written and practical examinations for persons who perform euthanasia.
- (2) Issuance of certification to persons who have successfully completed both training and examinations to become a euthanasia technician.
- (3) Recertification of euthanasia technicians on a periodic basis.
- (4) Standards and procedures for the approval of persons who conduct training of euthanasia technicians.
- (5) Approval of materials for use in euthanasia technician training.
- (6) Minimum certification criteria for persons seeking to become euthanasia technicians including, but not limited to: age; previous related experience; criminal record; and other qualifications that are related to an applicant's fitness to perform euthanasia.
- (7) Denial, suspension, or revocation of certification of euthanasia technicians who:
 - a. Violate any provision of this Article or rules adopted pursuant to this Article;
 - b. Have been convicted of or entered a plea of guilty or nolo contendere to:
 1. Any felony;

2. Any misdemeanor or infraction involving animal abuse or neglect; or
 3. Any other offense related to animal euthanasia, the duties or responsibilities of a euthanasia technician, or a euthanasia technician's fitness for certification;
- c. Make any false statement, give false information, or omit material information in connection with an application for certification or for renewal or reinstatement of certification as a euthanasia technician; or
 - d. Otherwise are or become ineligible for certification.
- (8) Provision of the names of persons who perform euthanasia at animal shelters and for the animal shelter to notify the Department when those persons are no longer affiliated, employed, or serving as a volunteer with the shelter.
 - (9) Certified euthanasia technicians to notify the Department when they are no longer employed by or are serving as a volunteer at an animal shelter.
 - (10) The duties, responsibilities, and standards of conduct for certified euthanasia technicians.

(c) Regardless of the extent to which the Board exercises its authority under subsection (b) of this section, the Department may deny, revoke, or suspend the certification of a euthanasia technician who has been convicted of or entered a plea of guilty or nolo contendere to a felony involving the illegal use, possession, sale, manufacture, distribution, or transportation of a controlled substance, drug, or narcotic.

(d) Persons seeking certification as euthanasia technicians, or a renewal of such certification, shall provide the Department a fingerprint card in a format acceptable to the Department, a form signed by the person consenting to a criminal record check and the use of the person's fingerprints, and such other identifying information as may be required by the State or national data banks. The Department may deny certification to persons who refuse to provide the fingerprint card or consent to the criminal background check. Fees required by the Department of Public Safety for conducting the criminal background check shall be collected by the Department and remitted to the Department of Public Safety along with the fingerprint card and consent form. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 5; 1987, c. 827, s. 62; 2004-199, s. 12; 2005-276, s. 11.5(b); 2005-345, s. 22; 2008-198, s. 2(a); 2010-127, ss. 2, 3; 2014-100, s. 17.1(o).)

§ 19A-25. Employees; investigations; right of entry.

For the enforcement of the provisions of this Article, the Director is authorized, subject to the approval of the Commissioner to appoint employees as are necessary in order to carry out and enforce the provisions of this Article, and to assign them interchangeably with other employees of the Animal Health Division. The Director shall cause the investigation of all reports of violations of the provisions of this Article, and the rules adopted pursuant to the provisions hereof; provided further, that if any person shall deny the Director or his representative admittance to his property, either person shall be entitled to secure from any superior court judge a court order granting such admittance. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 6; 1987, c. 827, s. 63.)

§ 19A-26. Certificate of registration required for animal shelter.

No person shall operate an animal shelter unless a certificate of registration for such animal shelter shall have been granted by the Director. Application for such certificate shall be made in the manner provided by the Director. No fee shall be required for such application or certificate.

Certificates of registration shall be valid for a period of one year or until suspended or revoked and may be renewed for like periods upon application in the manner provided. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 7; 1987, c. 827, s. 64.)

§ 19A-27. License required for operation of pet shop.

No person shall operate a pet shop unless a license to operate such establishment shall have been granted by the Director. Application for such license shall be made in the manner provided by the Director. The license shall be for the fiscal year and the license fee shall be seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) for each license period or part thereof beginning with the first day of the fiscal year. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 8; 1987, c. 827, s. 65; 1989, c. 544, s. 17; 2011-145, s. 31.5(a).)

§ 19A-28. License required for public auction or boarding kennel.

No person shall operate a public auction or a boarding kennel unless a license to operate such establishment shall have been granted by the Director. Application for such license shall be made in the manner provided by the Director. The license period shall be the fiscal year and the license fee shall be seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) for each license period or part thereof beginning with the first day of the fiscal year. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 9; 1987, c. 827, s. 65; 1989, c. 544, s. 18; 2011-145, s. 31.5(b).)

§ 19A-29. License required for dealer.

No person shall be a dealer unless a license to deal shall have been granted by the Director to such person. Application for such license shall be in the manner provided by the Director. The license period shall be the fiscal year and the license fee shall be seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) for each license period or part thereof, beginning with the first day of the fiscal year. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 10; 1987, c. 827, s. 66; 1989, c. 544, s. 19; 2011-145, s. 31.5(c).)

§ 19A-30. Refusal, suspension or revocation of certificate or license.

The Director may refuse to issue or renew or may suspend or revoke a certificate of registration for any animal shelter or a license for any public auction, kennel, pet shop, or dealer, if after an impartial investigation as provided in this Article he determines that any one or more of the following grounds apply:

- (1) Material misstatement in the application for the original certificate of registration or license or in the application for any renewal under this Article;
- (2) Willful disregard or violation of this Article or any rules issued pursuant thereto;
- (3) Failure to provide adequate housing facilities and/or primary enclosures for the purposes of this Article, or if the feeding, watering, sanitizing and housing practices at the animal shelter, public auction, pet shop, or kennel are not consistent with the intent of this Article or the rules adopted under this Article;
- (4) Allowing one's license under this Article to be used by an unlicensed person;
- (5) Conviction of any crime an essential element of which is misstatement, fraud, or dishonesty, or conviction of any felony;
- (6) Making substantial misrepresentations or false promises of a character likely to influence, persuade, or induce in connection with the business of a public auction, commercial kennel, pet shop, or dealer;

- (7) Pursuing a continued course of misrepresentation of or making false promises through advertising, salesmen, agents, or otherwise in connection with the business to be licensed;
- (8) Failure to possess the necessary qualifications or to meet the requirements of this Article for the issuance or holding of a certificate of registration or license.

The Director shall, before refusing to issue or renew and before suspension or revocation of a certificate of registration or a license, give to the applicant or holder thereof a written notice containing a statement indicating in what respects the applicant or holder has failed to satisfy the requirements for the holding of a certificate of registration or a license. If a certificate of registration or a license is suspended or revoked under the provisions hereof, the holder shall have five days from such suspension or revocation to surrender all certificates of registration or licenses issued thereunder to the Director or his authorized representative.

A person to whom a certificate of registration or a license is denied, suspended, or revoked by the Director may contest the action by filing a petition under G.S. 150B-23 within five days after the denial, suspension, or revocation.

Any licensee whose license is revoked under the provisions of this Article shall not be eligible to apply for a new license hereunder until one year has elapsed from the date of the order revoking said license or if an appeal is taken from said order of revocation, one year from the date of the order or final judgment sustaining said revocation. Any person who has been an officer, agent, or employee of a licensee whose license has been revoked or suspended and who is responsible for or participated in the violation upon which the order of suspension or revocation was based, shall not be licensed within the period during which the order of suspension or revocation is in effect. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 11; 1987, c. 827, s. 67.)

§ 19A-31. License not transferable; change in management, etc., of business or operation.

A license is not transferable. When there is a transfer of ownership, management, or operation of a business of a licensee hereunder, the new owner, manager, or operator, as the case may be, whether it be an individual, firm, partnership, corporation, or other entity shall have 10 days from such sale or transfer to secure a new license from the Director to operate said business. A licensee shall promptly notify the Director of any change in the name, address, management, or substantial control of his business or operation. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 12.)

§ 19A-32. Procedure for review of Director's decisions.

A denial, suspension, or revocation of a certificate or license under this Article shall be made in accordance with Chapter 150B of the General Statutes. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 13; 1987, c. 827, s. 68.)

§ 19A-32.1. Minimum holding period for animals in animal shelters; public viewing of animals in animal shelters; disposition of animals.

(a) Except as otherwise provided in this section, all animals received by an animal shelter or by an agent of an animal shelter shall be held for a minimum holding period of 72 hours, or for any longer minimum period established by a board of county commissioners, prior to being euthanized or otherwise disposed of.

(b) Before an animal may be euthanized or otherwise disposed of, it shall be made available for adoption under procedures that enable members of the public to inspect the animal, except in the following cases:

- (1) The animal has been found by the operator of the shelter to be unadoptable due to injury or defects of health or temperament.
- (2) The animal is seriously ill or injured, in which case the animal may be euthanized before the expiration of the minimum holding period if the manager of the animal shelter determines, in writing, that it is appropriate to do so. The writing shall include the reason for the determination.
- (3) The animal is being held as evidence in a pending criminal case.

(c) Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, a person who comes to an animal shelter attempting to locate a lost pet is entitled to view every animal held at the shelter, subject to rules providing for such viewing during at least four hours a day, three days a week. If the shelter is housing animals that must be kept apart from the general public for health reasons, public safety concerns, or in order to preserve evidence for criminal proceedings, the shelter shall make reasonable arrangements that allow pet owners to determine whether their lost pets are among those animals.

(d) During the minimum holding period, an animal shelter may place an animal it is holding into foster care by transferring possession of the animal to an approved foster care provider, an approved rescue organization, or the person who found the animal. If an animal shelter transfers possession of an animal under this subsection, at least one photograph depicting the head and face of the animal shall be displayed at the shelter in a conspicuous location that is available to the general public during hours of operation, and that photograph shall remain posted until the animal is disposed of as provided in subsection (f) of this section.

(e) If a shelter places an animal in foster care, the shelter may, in writing, appoint the person or organization possessing the animal to be an agent of the shelter. After the expiration of the minimum holding period, the shelter may (i) direct the agent possessing the animal to return it to the shelter, (ii) allow the agent to adopt the animal consistent with the shelter's adoption policies, or (iii) extend the period of time that the agent holds the animal on behalf of the shelter. A shelter may terminate an agency created under this subsection at any time by directing the agent to deliver the animal to the shelter. The local government or organization operating the shelter, as principal in the agency relationship, shall not be liable to reimburse the agent for the costs of care of the animal and shall not be liable to the owner of the animal for harm to the animal caused by the agent, absent a written contract providing otherwise.

(f) An animal that is surrendered to an animal shelter by the animal's owner and not reclaimed by that owner during the minimum holding period may be disposed of in one of the following manners:

- (1) Returned to the owner.
- (2) Adopted as a pet by a new owner.
- (3) Euthanized by a procedure approved by rules adopted by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services or, in the absence of such rules, by a procedure approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Humane Society of the United States, or the American Humane Association.

(g) An animal that is surrendered to an animal shelter by the animal's owner may be disposed of before the expiration of the minimum holding period in a manner authorized under subsection (f) of this section if the owner provides to the shelter (i) some proof of ownership of the animal and (ii) a signed written consent to the disposition of the animal before the expiration of the minimum holding period.

(h) If the owner of a dog surrenders the dog to an animal shelter, the owner shall state in writing whether the dog has bitten any individual within the 10 days preceding the date of surrender.

(i) An animal shelter shall require every person to whom an animal is released to present one of the following valid forms of government-issued photographic identification: (i) a drivers license, (ii) a special identification card issued under G.S. 20-37.7, (iii) a military identification card, or (iv) a passport. Upon presentation of the required photographic identification, the shelter shall document the name of the person, the type of photographic identification presented by the person, and the photographic identification number.

(j) Animal shelters shall maintain a record of all animals impounded at the shelter, shall retain those records for a period of at least three years from the date of impoundment, and shall make those records available for inspection during regular inspections pursuant to this Article or upon the request of a representative of the Animal Welfare Section. These records shall contain, at a minimum:

- (1) The date of impoundment.
- (2) The length of impoundment.
- (3) The disposition of each animal, including the name and address of any person to whom the animal is released, any institution that person represents, and the identifying information required under subsection (i) of this section.
- (4) Other information required by rules adopted by the Board of Agriculture. (2013-377, s. 2.)

§ 19A-33. Penalty for operation of pet shop, kennel or auction without license.

Operation of a pet shop, kennel, or public auction without a currently valid license shall constitute a Class 3 misdemeanor subject only to a penalty of not less than five dollars (\$5.00) nor more than twenty-five dollars (\$25.00), and each day of operation shall constitute a separate offense. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 14; 1993, c. 539, s. 315; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c).)

§ 19A-34. Penalty for acting as dealer without license; disposition of animals in custody of unlicensed dealer.

Acting as a dealer in animals as defined in this Article without a currently valid dealer's license shall constitute a Class 2 misdemeanor. Continued illegal operation after conviction shall constitute a separate offense. Animals found in possession or custody of an unlicensed dealer shall be subject to immediate seizure and impoundment and upon conviction of such unlicensed dealer shall become subject to sale or euthanasia in the discretion of the Director. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 15; 1993, c. 539, s. 316; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c).)

§ 19A-35. Penalty for failure to adequately care for animals; disposition of animals.

Failure of any person licensed or registered under this Article to adequately house, feed, and water animals in his possession or custody shall constitute a Class 3 misdemeanor, and such person shall be subject to a fine of not less than five dollars (\$5.00) per animal or more than a total of one thousand dollars (\$1,000). Such animals shall be subject to seizure and impoundment and upon conviction may be sold or euthanized at the discretion of the Director and such failure shall also constitute grounds for revocation of license after public hearing. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 16; 1999-408, s. 4.)

§ 19A-36. Penalty for violation of Article by dog warden.

Violation of any provision of this Article which relates to the seizing, impoundment, and custody of an animal by a dog warden shall constitute a Class 3 misdemeanor and the person convicted thereof shall be subject to a fine of not less than fifty dollars (\$50.00) and not more than one hundred dollars (\$100.00), and each animal handled in violation shall constitute a separate offense. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 17; 1993, c. 539, s. 317; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c).)

§ 19A-37. (Effective until contingency met – see note) Application of Article.

This Article shall not apply to a place or establishment which is operated under the immediate supervision of a duly licensed veterinarian as a hospital where animals are harbored, boarded, and cared for incidental to the treatment, prevention, or alleviation of disease processes during the routine practice of the profession of veterinary medicine. This Article shall not apply to any dealer, pet shop, public auction, commercial kennel or research facility during the period such dealer or research facility is in the possession of a valid license or registration granted by the Secretary of Agriculture pursuant to Title 7, Chapter 54, of the United States Code. This Article shall not apply to any individual who occasionally boards an animal on a noncommercial basis, although such individual may receive nominal sums to cover the cost of such boarding. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 18; 1987, c. 827, s. 69.)

§ 19A-37. (Effective once contingency met – see note) Application of Article.

This Article shall not apply to a place or establishment which is operated under the immediate supervision of a duly licensed veterinarian as a hospital where animals are harbored, boarded, and cared for incidental to the treatment, prevention, or alleviation of disease processes during the routine practice of the profession of veterinary medicine or a boarding kennel, as defined in G.S. 90-181.1. This Article shall not apply to any dealer, pet shop, public auction, commercial kennel or research facility during the period such dealer or research facility is in the possession of a valid license or registration granted by the Secretary of Agriculture pursuant to Title 7, Chapter 54, of the United States Code. This Article shall not apply to any individual who occasionally boards an animal on a noncommercial basis, although such individual may receive nominal sums to cover the cost of such boarding. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 18; 1987, c. 827, s. 69; 2023-63, s. 4(b).)

§ 19A-38. Use of license fees.

All license fees collected shall be used in enforcing and administering this Article. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 19.)

§ 19A-39. Article inapplicable to establishments for training hunting dogs.

Nothing in this Article shall apply to those kennels or establishments operated primarily for the purpose of boarding or training hunting dogs. (1977, 2nd Sess., c. 1217, s. 21; 1979, c. 734, s. 2.)

§ 19A-40. Civil Penalties.

The Director may assess a civil penalty of not more than five thousand dollars (\$5,000) against any person who violates a provision of this Article or any rule promulgated thereunder. In determining the amount of the penalty, the Director shall consider the degree and extent of harm caused by the violation. The clear proceeds of civil penalties assessed pursuant to this section shall be remitted to the Civil Penalty and Forfeiture Fund in accordance with G.S. 115C-457.2. (1995, c. 516, s. 6; 1998-215, s. 3.)

§ 19A-41. Legal representation by the Attorney General.

It shall be the duty of the Attorney General to represent the Commissioner of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, or to designate some member of his staff to represent the Commissioner and the Department, in all actions or proceedings in connection with this Article. (2005-276, s. 11.5(c).)

§ 19A-42. Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 19A-43. Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ 19A-44. Reserved for future codification purposes.

Article 4.

Animal Cruelty Investigators.

§ 19A-45. Appointment of animal cruelty investigators; term of office; removal; badge; oath; bond.

(a) The board of county commissioners is authorized to appoint one or more animal cruelty investigators to serve without any compensation or other employee benefits in his county. In making these appointments, the board may consider persons nominated by any society incorporated under North Carolina law for the prevention of cruelty to animals. Prior to making any such appointment, the board of county commissioners is authorized to enter into an agreement whereby any necessary expenses of caring for seized animals not collectable pursuant to G.S. 19A-47 may be paid by the animal cruelty investigator or by any society incorporated under North Carolina law for the prevention of cruelty to animals that is willing to bear such expense.

(b) Animal cruelty investigators shall serve a one-year term subject to removal for cause by the board of county commissioners. Animal cruelty investigators shall, while in the performance of their official duties, wear in plain view a badge of a design approved by the board identifying them as animal cruelty investigators, and provided at no cost to the county.

(c) Animal cruelty investigators shall take and subscribe the oath of office required of public officials. The oath shall be filed with the clerk of superior court. Animal cruelty investigators shall not be required to post any bond.

(d) Upon approval by the board of county commissioners, the animal cruelty investigator or investigators may be reimbursed for all necessary and actual expenses, to be paid by the county. (1979, c. 808, s. 1.)

§ 19A-46. Powers; magistrate's order; execution of order; petition; notice to owner.

(a) Whenever any animal is being cruelly treated as defined in G.S. 19A-1(2), an animal cruelty investigator may file with a magistrate a sworn complaint requesting an order allowing the investigator to provide suitable care for and take immediate custody of the animal. The magistrate shall issue the order only when he finds probable cause to believe that the animal is being cruelly treated and that it is necessary for the investigator to immediately take custody of it. Any magistrate's order issued under this section shall be valid for only 24 hours after its issuance. After he executes the order, the animal cruelty investigator shall return it with a written inventory of the animals seized to the clerk of court in the county where the order was issued.

(b) The animal cruelty investigator may request a law-enforcement officer or animal control officer to accompany him to help him seize the animal. An investigator may forcibly enter any premises or vehicle when necessary to execute the order only if he reasonably believes that the premises or vehicle is unoccupied by any person and that the animal is on the premises or in the vehicle. Forcible entry shall be used only when the animal cruelty investigator is accompanied by a law-enforcement officer. In any case, he must give notice of his identity and purpose to anyone who may be present before entering said premises. Forcible entry shall only be used during the daylight hours.

(c) When he has taken custody of such an animal, the animal cruelty investigator shall file a complaint pursuant to Article 1 of this Chapter as soon as possible. When he seizes the animal, he shall leave with the owner, if known, or affixed to the premises or vehicle a copy of the magistrate's order and a written notice of a description of the animal, the place where the animal will be taken, the reason for taking the animal, and the investigator's intent to file a complaint in district court requesting custody of the animal pursuant to Article 1 of this Chapter.

(d) Notwithstanding the provisions of G.S. 7A-305(c), any person who commences a proceeding under this Article or Article 1 of this Chapter shall not be required to pay any court costs or fees prior to a final judicial determination as provided in G.S. 19A-4, at which time those costs shall be paid pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 6-18.

(e) Any judicial order authorizing forcible entry shall be issued by a district court judge. (1979, c. 808, s. 1.)

§ 19A-47. Care of seized animals.

The investigator must take any animal he seizes directly to some safe and secure place and provide suitable care for it. The necessary expenses of caring for seized animals, including necessary veterinary care, shall be a charge against the animal's owner and a lien on the animal to be enforced as provided by G.S. 44A-4. (1979, c. 808, s. 1.)

§ 19A-48. Interference unlawful.

It shall be a Class 1 misdemeanor, to interfere with an animal cruelty investigator in the performance of his official duties. (1979, c. 808, s. 1; 1993, c. 539, s. 318; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c).)

§ 19A-49. Educational requirements.

Each animal cruelty investigator at his own expense must attend annually a course of at least six hours instruction offered by the North Carolina Humane Federation or some other agency. The course shall be designed to give the investigator expertise in the investigation of complaints relating to the care and treatment of animals. Failure to attend a course approved by the board of county commissioners shall be cause for removal from office. (1979, c. 808, s. 1.)

§§ 19A-50 through 19A-59. Reserved for future codification purposes.

ARTICLE 5.

Spay/Neuter Program.

§ 19A-60. Legislative findings.

The General Assembly finds that the uncontrolled breeding of cats and dogs in the State has led to unacceptable numbers of unwanted dogs, puppies and cats and kittens. These unwanted animals

become strays and constitute a public nuisance and a public health hazard. The animals themselves suffer privation and death, are impounded, and most are destroyed at great expense to local governments. It is the intention of the General Assembly to provide a voluntary means of funding a spay/neuter program to provide financial assistance to local governments offering low-income persons reduced-cost spay/neuter services for their dogs and cats and to provide a statewide education program on the benefits of spaying and neutering pets. (2000-163, s. 1.)

§ 19A-61. Spay/Neuter Program established.

There is established in the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services a voluntary statewide program to foster the spaying and neutering of dogs and cats for the purpose of reducing the population of unwanted animals in the State. The program shall consist of the following components:

- (1) Education Program. – The Department shall establish a statewide program to educate the public about the benefits of having cats and dogs spayed and neutered. The Department may work cooperatively on the program with the North Carolina School of Veterinary Medicine, other State agencies and departments, county and city health departments and animal control agencies, and statewide and local humane organizations. The Department may employ outside consultants to assist with the education program.
- (2) Local Spay/Neuter Assistance Program. – The Department shall administer the Spay/Neuter Account established in G.S. 19A-62. Monies deposited in the account shall be available to reimburse eligible counties and cities for the direct costs of spay/neuter surgeries for cats and dogs made available to low-income persons. (2000-163, s. 1; 2010-31, s. 11.4(b).)

§ 19A-62. Spay/Neuter Account established.

(a) Creation. – The Spay/Neuter Account is established as a nonreverting special revenue account in the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The Account consists of the following:

- (1) Repealed by Session Laws 2010-31, s. 11.4(c), effective October 1, 2010.
- (2) Twenty dollars (\$20.00) of the additional fee imposed by G.S. 20-79.7 for an Animal Lovers special license plate.
- (3) Any other funds available from appropriations by the General Assembly or from contributions and grants from public or private sources.

(b) Use. – The revenue in the Account shall be used by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services as follows:

- (1) Repealed by Session Laws 2010-31, s. 11.4(c), effective October 1, 2010.
- (2) Up to twenty percent (20%) may be used to develop and implement the statewide education program component of the Spay/Neuter Program established in G.S. 19A-61(1).
- (3) Up to twenty percent (20%) of the money in the Account may be used to defray the costs of administering the Spay/Neuter Program established in this Article.
- (4) Funds remaining after deductions for the education program and administrative expenses shall be distributed quarterly to eligible counties and cities seeking reimbursement for reduced-cost spay/neuter surgeries performed during the previous calendar year. A county or city is ineligible to receive funds under this

subdivision unless it requires the owner to show proof of rabies vaccination at the time of the procedure or, if none, require vaccination at the time of the procedure.

(c) Report. – In March of each year, the Department must report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources and the Fiscal Research Division. The report must contain information regarding all revenues and expenditures of the Spay/Neuter Account. (2000-163, s. 1; 2007-487, ss. 2, 3; 2008-187, s. 8; 2010-31, s. 11.4(c); 2011-326, s. 4; 2015-263, s. 25(b); 2020-78, s. 5.1(a).)

§ 19A-63. Eligibility for distributions from Spay/Neuter Account; Definitions.

(a) A county or city is eligible for reimbursement from the Spay/Neuter Account if it meets the following condition:

(1) The county or city offers one or more of the following programs to low-income persons on a year-round basis for the purpose of reducing the cost of spaying and neutering procedures for dogs and cats:

- a. A spay/neuter clinic operated by the county or city.
- b. A spay/neuter clinic operated by a non-profit organization under contract or other arrangement with the county or city.
- c. A contract or contracts with one or more veterinarians, whether or not located within the county, to provide reduced-cost spaying and neutering procedures.
- d. Subvention of the spaying and neutering costs incurred by low-income pet owners through the use of vouchers or other procedure that provides a discount of the cost of the spaying or neutering procedure fixed by a participating veterinarian.
- e. Subvention of the spaying and neutering costs incurred by persons who adopt a pet from an animal shelter operated by or under contract with the county or city.

(2) Reserved for future codification purposes.

(b) The following definitions apply in this Article:

(1) Local veterinarian. – A veterinarian licensed by the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Board under Article 11 of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes and practicing within the county where the services are provided. If no licensed veterinarian practices within that county, then a local veterinarian is a licensed veterinarian practicing in a county adjacent to the county where the services are provided. For purposes of this definition, "practicing" means engaging in the practice of veterinary medicine, as defined in Article 11 of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes.

(2) Low-income person. – An individual who qualifies for one or more of the programs of public assistance administered by the Department of Health and Human Services pursuant to Chapter 108A of the General Statutes or whose annual household income is lower than one hundred percent (100%) of the federal poverty level guidelines published by the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

(c) Each county shall make rules or publish guidelines that designate what proof a low-income person must submit to establish that the person has an annual household income lower

than one hundred percent (100%) of the federal poverty level guidelines published by the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

(d) Each county shall provide the opportunity to participate in the program created by this Article to all local veterinarians. Proof of the provision of this opportunity shall be included in the first reimbursement request of each calendar year. (2000-163, s. 1; 2010-31, s. 11.4(d); 2015-241, s. 13.7(a); 2016-94, ss. 13.1(a), (b).)

§ 19A-64. Distributions to counties and cities from Spay/Neuter Account.

(a) Reimbursable Costs. – Counties and cities eligible for distributions from the Spay/Neuter Account may receive reimbursement for the direct costs of a spay/neuter surgical procedure for a dog or cat owned by a low-income person as defined in G.S. 19A-63(b). Reimbursable costs shall include anesthesia, medication, and veterinary services. Counties and cities shall not be reimbursed for the administrative costs of providing reduced-cost spay/neuter services or capital expenditures for facilities and equipment associated with the provision of such services. The reimbursement amount for each surgical procedure for a female dog or cat shall be no more than one hundred fifty percent (150%) of the average reimbursement allowed for surgical procedures for female dogs and cats by the Spay/Neuter Program during the prior calendar year. The reimbursement amount for each surgical procedure for a male dog or cat shall be no more than one hundred fifty percent (150%) of the average reimbursement allowed for surgical procedures for male dogs and cats by the Spay/Neuter Program during the prior calendar year.

(b) Application. – A county or city eligible for reimbursement of spaying and neutering costs from the Spay/Neuter Account shall apply to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services by the last day of January, April, July, and October of each year to receive a distribution from the Account for that quarter. The application shall be submitted in the form required by the Department and shall include an itemized listing of the costs for which reimbursement is sought.

(c) Distribution. – The Department shall make payments from the Spay/Neuter Account to eligible counties and cities who have made timely application for reimbursement within 30 days of the closing date for receipt of applications for that quarter. In the event that total requests for reimbursement exceed the amounts available in the Spay/neuter Account for distribution, the monies available will be distributed as follows:

- (1) Fifty percent (50%) of the monies available in the Spay/Neuter Account shall be reserved for reimbursement for eligible applicants within development tier one areas as defined in G.S. 143B-437.08. The remaining fifty percent (50%) of the funds shall be used to fund reimbursement requests from eligible applicants in development tier two and three areas as defined in G.S. 143B-437.08.
- (2) Among the eligible counties and cities in development tier one areas, reimbursement shall be made to each eligible county or city in the proportion that the rate of spays and neuters per one thousand persons in that city or county compares to the total rate of spays and neuters per one thousand persons within the total tier one area. Population data shall be obtained from the most recent decennial census.
- (3) Among the eligible counties and cities in development tier two and three areas, reimbursement shall be made to each eligible county or city in the proportion that the rate of spays and neuters per one thousand persons in that city or county compares to the total rate of spays and neuters per one thousand persons within

the total tier two and three area. Population data shall be obtained from the most recent decennial census.

- (4) Should funds remain available from the fifty percent (50%) of the Spay/Neuter Account designated for development tier one areas after reimbursement of all claims by eligible applicants in those areas, the remaining funds shall be made available to reimburse eligible applicants in development tier two and three areas. (2000-163, s. 1; 2006-252, s. 2.11; 2010-31, s. 11.4(e); 2013-377, s. 4.)

§ 19A-65. Annual Report Required From Every Animal Shelter in Receipt of State or Local Funding.

Every county or city animal shelter, or animal shelter operated under contract with a county or city or otherwise in receipt of State or local funding shall prepare an annual report in the form required by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services setting forth the numbers, by species, of animals received into the shelter, the number adopted out, the number returned to owner, and the number destroyed. The report shall also contain the total operating expenses of the shelter and the cost per animal handled. The report shall be filed with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services by March 1 of each year. A city or county that does not timely file the report required by this section is not eligible to receive reimbursement payments under G.S. 19A-64 during the calendar year in which the report was to be filed. (2000-163, s. 5; 2010-31, s. 11.4(f).)

§ 19A-66. Notification of available funding.

Prior to January 1 of each year, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall notify counties and cities that have, prior to that notification deadline, established eligibility for distribution of funds from the Spay/Neuter Account pursuant to G.S. 19A-63, of the following:

- (1) The amount of funding in the Spay/Neuter Account that the Department will have available for distribution to each county or city receiving notification to pay reimbursement requests submitted by the county or city during the calendar year following the notification deadline; and
- (2) The amount of additional funding, if any, the Department estimates, but does not guarantee, may be available to pay reimbursement requests submitted by the notified county or city to the Department during the calendar year following the notification deadline.
- (3) The maximum amount that may be reimbursed for each surgical procedure for a female dog or cat during the upcoming calendar year.
- (4) The maximum amount that may be reimbursed for each surgical procedure for a male dog or cat during the upcoming calendar year. (2010-31, s. 11.4(g); 2013-377, s. 5.)

Article 5A.

Animal Shelter Support Fund.

§ 19A-67. Animal Shelter Support Fund.

(a) Creation. – The Animal Shelter Support Fund is established as a special fund in the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The Fund consists of appropriations by the General Assembly or contributions and grants from public or private sources.

(b) Use. – The Fund shall be used by the Animal Welfare Section of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to provide grants to local governments for expenses related to their operation of a registered animal shelter due to any of the following:

(1) The denial, suspension, or revocation of the shelter's registration, or compliance with applicable requirements of the Animal Welfare Act or rules adopted by the Board of Agriculture implementing that Act.

(2) An unforeseen catastrophic disaster at an animal shelter.

(c) Rules. – The Board of Agriculture shall issue rules detailing eligible expenses and application guidelines that comply with the requirements of this Article.

(d) Repealed by Session Laws 2021-180, s. 10.5B, effective July 1, 2021. (2015-241, s. 13.7(b); 2016-113, s. 6(a); 2021-180, s. 10.5B.)

§ 19A-68. Grants to counties and cities from Animal Shelter Support Fund.

(a) Eligible Costs. – Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, governments eligible for distributions from the Animal Shelter Support Fund may receive funding only for the direct operational costs of the animal shelter following an event described in G.S. 19A-67(b). For purposes of this subsection, direct operational costs shall include veterinary services, sanitation services and needs, animal sustenance and supplies, and temporary housing and sheltering. Counties and cities shall not receive funding for administrative costs or capital expenditures for facilities and equipment, unless those costs are required to comply with the Animal Welfare Act or rules adopted by the Board of Agriculture implementing that Act.

(b) Repealed by Session Laws 2021-180, s. 10.5B, effective July 1, 2021.

(c) Application. – A county or city eligible for a grant from the Animal Shelter Support Fund shall apply to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The application shall be submitted in the form required by the Department and shall include an itemized listing of the costs for which funding is sought.

(d) Repealed by Session Laws 2021-180, s. 10.5B, effective July 1, 2021.

(e) Limitation. – Grants from the Animal Shelter Support Fund are limited to fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) per grantee in any fiscal year. (2015-241, s. 13.7(b); 2021-180, s. 10.5B.)

§ 19A-69. Report.

The Department shall report annually to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources and the Fiscal Research Division no later than March 1. The report shall contain information regarding all revenues and expenditures of the Animal Shelter Support Fund. (2015-241, s. 13.7(b); 2020-78, s. 5.1(b).)

Article 6.

Care of Animal Subjected to Illegal Treatment.

§ 19A-70. Care of animal subjected to illegal treatment.

(a) In every arrest under any provision of Article 47 of Chapter 14 of the General Statutes or under G.S. 67-4.3 or upon the commencement of an action under Article 1 of this Chapter by a county or municipality, by a county-approved animal cruelty investigator, by other county or municipal official, or by an organization operating a county or municipal shelter under contract, if an animal shelter takes custody of an animal, the operator of the shelter may file a petition with the court requesting that the defendant be ordered to deposit funds in an amount sufficient to secure

payment of all the reasonable expenses expected to be incurred by the animal shelter in caring for and providing for the animal pending the disposition of the litigation. For purposes of this section, "reasonable expenses" includes the cost of providing food, water, shelter, and care, including medical care, for at least 30 days.

(b) Upon receipt of a petition, the court shall set a hearing on the petition to determine the need to care for and provide for the animal pending the disposition of the litigation. The hearing shall be conducted no less than 10 and no more than 15 business days after the petition is filed. The operator of the animal shelter shall mail written notice of the hearing and a copy of the petition to the defendant at the address contained in the criminal charges or the complaint or summons by which a civil action was initiated. If the defendant is in a local detention facility at the time the petition is filed, the operator of the animal shelter shall also provide notice to the custodian of the detention facility.

(c) The court shall set the amount of funds necessary for 30 days' care after taking into consideration all of the facts and circumstances of the case, including the need to care for and provide for the animal pending the disposition of the litigation, the recommendation of the operator of the animal shelter, the estimated cost of caring for and providing for the animal, and the defendant's ability to pay. If the court determines that the defendant is unable to deposit funds, the court may consider issuing an order under subsection (f) of this section.

Any order for funds to be deposited pursuant to this section shall state that if the operator of the animal shelter files an affidavit with the clerk of superior court, at least two business days prior to the expiration of a 30-day period, stating that, to the best of the affiant's knowledge, the case against the defendant has not yet been resolved, the order shall be automatically renewed every 30 days until the case is resolved.

(d) If the court orders that funds be deposited, the amount of funds necessary for 30 days shall be posted with the clerk of superior court. The defendant shall also deposit the same amount with the clerk of superior court every 30 days thereafter until the litigation is resolved, unless the defendant requests a hearing no less than five business days prior to the expiration of a 30-day period. If the defendant fails to deposit the funds within five business days of the initial hearing, or five business days of the expiration of a 30-day period, the animal is forfeited by operation of law. If funds have been deposited in accordance with this section, the operator of the animal shelter may draw from the funds the actual costs incurred in caring for the animal.

In the event of forfeiture, the animal shelter may determine whether the animal is suitable for adoption and whether adoption can be arranged for the animal. The animal may not be adopted by the defendant or by any person residing in the defendant's household. If the adopted animal is a dog used for fighting, the animal shelter shall notify any persons adopting the dog of the liability provisions for owners of dangerous dogs under Article 1A of Chapter 67 of the General Statutes. If no adoption can be arranged after the forfeiture, or the animal is unsuitable for adoption, the shelter shall humanely euthanize the animal.

(e) The deposit of funds shall not prevent the animal shelter from disposing of the animal prior to the expiration of the 30-day period covered by the deposit if the court makes a final determination of the charges or claims against the defendant. Upon determination, the defendant is entitled to a refund for any portion of the deposit not incurred as expenses by the animal shelter. A person who is acquitted of all criminal charges or not found to have committed animal cruelty in a civil action under Article 1 of this Chapter is entitled to a refund of the deposit remaining after any draws from the deposit in accordance with subsection (d) of this section.

(f) Pursuant to subsection (c) of this section, the court may order a defendant to provide necessary food, water, shelter, and care, including any necessary medical care, for any animal that is the basis of the charges or claims against the defendant without the removal of the animal from the existing location and until the charges or claims against the defendant are adjudicated. If the court issues such an order, the court shall provide for an animal control officer or other law enforcement officer to make regular visits to the location to ensure that the animal is receiving necessary food, water, shelter, and care, including any necessary medical care, and to impound the animal if it is not receiving those necessities. (2005-383, s. 1; 2006-113, s. 2.1.)