

# Veterinary Students Making a Difference

## Veterinary Students Travel to Sacramento to Advocate for Bills to Ban Ear Cropping and Force Feeding of Birds



Attending the legislative hearing on the proposed ear cropping ban are (from left to right): University of California veterinary student Christi Payne and her niece, Haley Zavattero, Western University veterinary students Heather Applegate and Jaimie Sun Siegel, AVAR staff member Pam Runquist, Senator Liz Figueroa, AVAR National Director Teri Barnato, AVAR veterinary members Dr. Barbara Hodges, Dr. Lara Rasmussen and Dr. Laurie Siperstein-Cook.

AVAR student chapter representatives from Western University of Health Sciences and the University of California traveled to Sacramento in August to testify at a legislative hearing on a proposed ear cropping ban in California. Joining the students to speak in support of the bill was Dr. Lara Rasmussen, head of the surgery department at Western University and faculty advisor to the school's AVAR student chapter.

The ear cropping ban was included in a funding bill for the California Veterinary Medical Board, SB 1548. The bill's author, Senator Liz Figueroa, included the ear cropping ban in the funding bill because she agreed with AVAR that the procedure is cosmetic and not in the best interest of the dogs. The California Veterinary Medical Association also was in support of the ban since it was placed in the Penal Code and would apply to everyone, not just veterinarians. However, due to significant opposition from breed clubs, the ban was removed from SB 1548 before the bill was approved by the Legislature. AVAR plans to continue to work with veterinary students on this and other legislative efforts during the current academic year.

Earlier in the year, AVAR student members from University of California also attended a legislative hearing on SB 1520, the bill to ban the force feeding of ducks and geese in the production of foie gras. UC Davis students Christi Payne, Merriss Waters and Bethann Palermo spoke in support of SB 1520, along with several AVAR veterinary members and dozens of animal protection advocates from throughout California. (SB 1520 was passed into law in September and, due to a phase out period in the bill, the ban, will take effect in California in 2012.)

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## Lawsuit Over Pound-Seized Animals Slowed By County Maneuvering

A lawsuit filed earlier this year against Sacramento County, California, for failing to comply with county requirements regarding the sales of animals for research and teaching is moving along slowly due to legal maneuvering by the county's legal counsel. Sacramento County is the last county in the state of California which still allows sales of unclaimed companion cats and dogs for research and teaching from its shelter. The animals are sold to the University of California, Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine (UCD) and Sutter Hospital.

In 1986, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement was adopted by the county as a result of public concern regarding the practice of "pound seizure," whereby adoptable yet unclaimed animals are sold from the shelter for various medical and educational uses. In order for animals to be purchased and then used for research or teaching, the purchasers agreed to comply with various requirements set forth by the county. Those requirements include keeping records, ensuring the animals are not used in duplicative procedures, complying with local, state and federal laws, and keeping animals free from avoidable stress. For 18 years, almost every requirement of the MOU has been violated.

"A shelter is supposed to be a place where animals can be found if lost or are adopted when they have been abandoned. Selling them creates distrust in the community and leaves open the possibility that a lost companion could end up being used for research or teaching. The practice of purchasing unwanted or unclaimed animals for research or teaching does not reflect a concern for the well-being of animals by the veterinary profession," said Pam Runquist, AVAR's Director of Companion Animal Issues. "The veterinary profession should be doing more to prevent overpopulation and the resulting unwanted animals instead of taking advantage of the situation."

The AVAR has tried for years to get the policy of selling animals by Sacramento County changed, including trying to convince the University of California School of Veterinary Medicine to stop purchasing shelter animals for veterinary training. Most of the hundreds of animals sold each year were used in terminal procedures at the veterinary school. However, UCD has made substantial changes to its curriculum, making pound-seized animals unnecessary to its training of veterinary students. Sutter Hospital uses animals for research, as does UCD.

The AVAR and the other plaintiffs have had to file a third complaint against the county because the county is arguing that the plaintiffs do not have standing to sue. A judge is to decide on the matter in the next few weeks. The lawsuit, if successful, will prohibit future sales of animals from the shelter.