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**DEPARTMENT OF
ANIMAL SERVICES**
221 N. Figueroa Street
6TH Floor, Suite #600
Los Angeles, CA 90012

(888) 452-7381
FAX (213) 482-9511

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Administration

ANNETTE G. RAMIREZ
ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER
Lifesaving

DR. JEREMY PRUPAS
CHIEF VETERINARIAN

December 10, 2024

Council File No.: 24-0804
Council Districts: All
Contact person and phone:
Annette Ramirez (213) 482-9558

The Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council
Neighborhoods and Community Enrichment Committee
c/o Office of the City Clerk
City Hall Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: Eric Villanueva, Legislative Assistant

**SUBJECT: CF NO. 24-0804 – DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SERVICES REPORT ON THE
FEASIBILITY OF REQUIRING ALL DOGS, CATS, RABBITS AND HORSES BE MICROCHIPPED
INCLUDING THE STEPS NECESSARY OVER THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS TO IMPLEMENT
SUCH A REQUIREMENT**

Recommendation for Council Action:

NOTE AND FILE this report as this report is for informational purposes only.

SUMMARY

Los Angeles County mandates that dogs and cats four months or older must be implanted with an identifying microchip. The mandate applies to unincorporated areas of the County and to cities that contract with the County's Department of Animal Care and Control for services. The City of Los Angeles does not currently have a citywide mandate for microchipping. Council advised that the Department of Animal Services explore the feasibility of requiring that dogs, cats, rabbits, and horses be microchipped in order to reduce the number of lost pets in the City's animal shelters.

BACKGROUND

City of Los Angeles Today

In an effort to assist pet owners and reduce the number of lost pets coming into the City's shelters, the Department of Animal Services (Department) currently offers microchipping services to City residents. The Department charges \$15 for the service and also uses grant funding to subsidize the cost for pet

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owners who cannot afford the fee. Pets are also microchipped and the microchips registered upon adoption from City of Los Angeles shelters. This is not the case with many other locations/events where pet microchipping occurs. In many instances, the registration of the chip itself is left for the pet parent to complete. Through data provided by one of our partner agencies we know that only 60% of the microchips that are implanted, get registered. Lack of registration or updating information on the microchips renders them ineffective.

Per pet data received from Michelson Found Animals, there are approximately 2.4 million pets in households across the City of Los Angeles. Of those households, an estimated 25% of their pets are microchipped (600,000). This leaves approximately 1.8 million pets in the City of Los Angeles unchipped.

In terms of other resources and staffing dedicated to these microchipping efforts. To procure the microchips, the City of Los Angeles has an agreement with 24Pet to purchase microchips at a cost of \$3.01 per chip. If accounting for the estimated pets not currently microchipped in the City of LA, it would cost approximately \$5.4 million, in microchip costs alone (excluding horses) to implant microchips into all of the City's household pets. This number does not include other related costs associated with implantation or administration of a citywide mandatory microchipping program.

Registered Veterinary Technicians and Veterinarians are currently the only Department staff trained to implant microchips. These are the only two classifications where this duty/responsibility is detailed in their respective job descriptions.

Municipalities with Microchipping Mandates

In researching the feasibility and potential impacts of implementing a mandatory microchipping ordinance in the City of Los Angeles, the Department sought information from other municipalities that have already implemented such mandates to determine how the mandates have impacted their shelter operations and lost pet return-to-home rates. Researching how these other government agencies are operating these programs can also provide good insight into which practices may be ideal for the City of Los Angeles. Our partners at Michelson Found Animals provided information on the mandatory pet microchipping programs for three local municipalities: The County of Los Angeles, Dallas, Texas and Washoe County (Reno), Nevada.

Los Angeles County

- Microchipping of dogs and cats in the Los Angeles County code requires that a dog or cat four months or older must be implanted with an identifying microchip. The owner or custodian is required to provide the microchip number to the Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control (LA County) and to notify LA County and the applicable national microchip registry of a change of ownership of the dog or cat, or the owner's change of address or telephone number.
- To assist with resident compliance, LA County hosts bi-weekly vaccination clinics at all six of their Animal Care Centers where microchips can be obtained for \$7.50. This does not include registration of the microchip.
- Microchips purchased by LA County do not come with a registry.
- Despite the existing ordinance mandating microchipping, Los Angeles County's return-to-home rate stands at only 11%.

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Dallas, Texas

- All dogs and cats in the City of Dallas must be microchipped. The information on the microchip including owner name, address and contact information must be kept current (updated within 30 days of any change). Mandatory microchipping has replaced the requirement for animal registration/pet licensing in the City of Dallas.
- The City of Dallas municipal code states that:
 - an owner of a dog or cat commits an offense if the dog or cat does not have a microchip
 - the owner of a dog or cat shall maintain his or her current contact information with a microchip registration company.

Washoe County (Reno), Nevada

- Washoe County, Nevada spent \$8,100 in Fiscal Year 2023 on microchips.
- The County's data shows that their up-front expenditures on microchips are recovered by reducing intake and length of stay.
- Washoe County residents may come to the shelter any time during open business hours to get an animal microchipped for free. The implanted microchip is registered in their internal system and with 24Pet.
- The County hosts monthly vaccine clinics that include free microchips.
- Current return-to-home rate for dogs is 67%
- A review of the data from Washoe County indicates that the length of stay for animals brought in with microchips has not decreased. The most significant impact on reducing shelter populations, while minimizing costs, comes from Field Officers returning animals directly to their homes after scanning for microchips, rather than taking them to the shelter to be processed there.
- Based on data received from Michelson Found Animals, Washoe County has achieved quantifiable and sizable cost savings due to their microchipping mandate. Per Michelson, Washoe County has saved approximately \$177,680 in sheltering costs through dog return-to-owner (RTO) incidents and \$182 through cat RTOs conducted in the field.

Considerations for Implementation

The experiences of other municipalities that have implemented mandatory pet microchipping has proven that there are potential benefits to implementing such policies. While there may be front-end and overhead costs (increased staffing, training, equipment purchases, etc.), if implemented effectively, the Department could ultimately benefit from other operational cost savings through reduced intake and reduced length of stay for lost owned animals. Increased return-to-home rates helps alleviate shelter overcrowding, which also reduces expenditures for food and medications. The reduced overcrowding also increases staff and customer safety, reducing bite counts and lawsuit payouts.

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One lesson learned from researching the experiences of other municipalities is that a non-punitive approach is likely to achieve greater results. To ensure effectiveness, the program should avoid punitive measures. A proactive strategy focused on community engagement and education must be adopted. A legislative solution or mandate with penalties for non-compliance may not yield the intended results. Legislation of this nature may have the unintended consequence of disproportionately punishing people experiencing poverty.

If the City of Los Angeles were to implement such a program, the microchips must be both affordable and widely accessible, with staff trained to implant them. Not only would both staff and shelter resources need to be dedicated to the program on a daily basis but constant community outreach and partnerships for regular microchipping clinics would be essential.

The Department would also need to establish or partner with other existing systems to consistently and effectively ensure microchip registration as well as track and monitor data to ensure information remains protected and up-to-date.

In understanding that developing and implementing such a mandatory program would require a considerable increase in staffing and resources and a carefully considered communication and roll-out plan to the community, the Department recommends that prior to instituting such a mandate that a one-year pilot program be established to educate residents on the benefits of microchipping and increase the number of microchip implantation events to monitor the impact on operations and cost savings. As part of the pilot program, the Department would continue to engage with other municipalities such as Los Angeles County to gather additional insights. Working with the County of Los Angeles may also help with establishing consistent messaging across both the City and County. Creating synergy with the efforts of both organizations could improve operational results and community impact. The Department's increased efforts as part of the pilot program would also provide the opportunity for increased and improved partnerships with local organizations to facilitate regular clinics throughout the city. Lastly, over the course of a year-long pilot program, the Department will work with other City departments such as the Personnel Department and the City Administrative Office to update the duties and responsibilities for other Department classifications to include assisting with microchip implantation and training staff to assist with microchip implantation and registration efforts. A pilot program will also allow for additional time to identify appropriate and adequate funding sources to officially implement a program mandating that all pets be microchipped.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Annette G. Ramirez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Annette" being more prominent.

Annette G. Ramirez
Acting General Manager