



**July 21, 2014**

**Comments regarding a proposed plan to require veterinarians to report private client information for the purpose of increasing pet licensure.**

**As veterinarians, we believe that licensing pets is good public policy. But we vigorously oppose any government effort forcing us to report private client information to King County. Here's why:**

- 1. Compelling veterinarians to divulge confidential information is a violation of the veterinary-client-patient relationship. The medical record is the property of the veterinarian who creates it, and as veterinarians, we accept an ethical obligation to protect the record and the confidential information that it contains.**
- 2. Having veterinarians report client information will cause pet owners to avoid bringing their pets to see us, negatively impacting animal and public health. Fewer visits to veterinarians to avoid being reported mean fewer opportunities to optimally manage pet health and fewer rabies and other vaccinations given. We cannot prevent disease and protect the public if owners fear bringing their pets to us.**
- 3. Pet owners are also opposed to mandatory reporting of their private information. Over **6,500** King County residents have signed petitions backing our position.**
- 4. 80% of dogs and cats in King County are unlicensed. The low number of licensed pets in King County suggests that pet owners see little value or return on their investment when licensing their cat or dog. Reasons for this include:**
  - a. RASKC suffers from a poor public image. We have spent many hours with King County officials advising them that their marketing materials are ineffective and send a punitive message to the community. License your pet or else! An effective marketing campaign could improve RASKC's image and tell the story of why licensing benefits pet owners as well as the entire community.**
  - b. From the comments we've seen, many pet owners are unaware they have to license their pet. It appears that the community has not been adequately educated on the requirement of pet licensing. An effective educational campaign could greatly increase awareness.**

- c. King County pet licenses are one of the most expensive in the country. In a time when many can't afford an office visit to the veterinarian, \$30 for a spayed or neutered pet presents a barrier for many pet owners.

As veterinarians, the health and safety of our clients' pets as well as the public is our highest priority. We stand ready to work with King County to find a way to increase licensed pets in our community. That is good public policy. But mandating that veterinarians turn over the names of owners of unlicensed pets cannot work. We will vigorously oppose any such mandate.

### **Signatures and Public Comment**

#### **Total 6,748 - Signatures and Comments as of July 21, 2014**

**5,684** – The total number of signatures on petitions posted in King County veterinary practices of pet owners who oppose veterinarians giving their private information to the County for the purposes of licensing.

**864** – The total number of signatures on the Change.org petition, "Don't make veterinarians rat out their clients!" <https://www.change.org/petitions/king-county-council-don-t-make-veterinarians-rat-out-their-clients>

**200** – The number of comments to the Reddit.com thread "King Co. want veterinarians to release their client lists so they can compare w/ pet licenses & send citations." [http://www.reddit.com/r/Seattle/comments/265v0x/king\\_co\\_want\\_veterinarians\\_to\\_release\\_their/](http://www.reddit.com/r/Seattle/comments/265v0x/king_co_want_veterinarians_to_release_their/)

**75** – The number of comments in response to the Op-Ed piece in the Seattle Times, July 4, 2014: "King County pet-license plan should be put to sleep." [http://seattletimes.com/html/editorials/2023988100\\_petlicensingeditxml.html](http://seattletimes.com/html/editorials/2023988100_petlicensingeditxml.html)

Comments from the public on Change.org and Reddit.com are critical towards efforts to have veterinarians release private client information to King County for the purposes of licensing pets.

Comments from the public include the following themes:

- Pet owners will avoid getting veterinary care and vaccinating their pets if they know that they will be turned in to the County. Animal and public health will suffer.
- It's an invasion of privacy on the County's part, a breach in patient/doctor trust. Veterinarians are healthcare professionals and should be under the same kind of privacy standards as other medical workers.
- It will discourage good Samaritans who might bring in a stray to a veterinary clinic because they fear being hounded for a license for a pet they don't own.
- Cat owners don't believe they should have to license their indoor cat(s).

- It turns the veterinarian-client relationship into an adversarial one.
- Have the County do a better job of education and enforcement, rather than putting the burden on veterinarians.
- Some had no idea they had to license their pets.
- This plan doesn't do anything to help pets of irresponsible pet owners.
- It will encourage pet owners to leave the jurisdiction and get veterinary care elsewhere.
- It is not the place of the veterinary community to help enforce county rules and regulations.
- Pet licenses are too expensive.