

Why are animal shelters important? I think it's a question that crosses a lot of people's minds when it comes to allocating resources. However, as a long-time volunteer at Montgomery Animal Services and Adoption Center (MCASAC) I have been fortunate enough to see the many ways this organization is vital to the county and local community. The commitment to the animals being cared for there not only changes their lives, but so many of those who walk through their doors. You don't have to listen to me, the facts prove why having a well-funded shelter is absolutely vital.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture says, "The intentional efforts to increase and promote spay/neuter services over the past 50 years has been the single most important driver in reducing pet overpopulation and euthanasia in shelters." In just seven years a pair of unneutered or unsplayed cats can have tens of thousands of offspring. Unneutered dogs will travel miles to follow the scent of an unsplayed dog in order to mate. MCASAC's neuter/spay clinic and the shelter's overall policy to make sure every animal that leaves the facility is fixed helps there be more population control, and even more importantly, serves to lessen the amount of euthanasia's that need to be performed. More lives bettered and saved.

Humane World states, "The economy is also playing a major role. Since 2019, the cost of pet services (such as veterinary bills and grooming) has climbed 42% while the cost of pet food has risen 22%. These rising costs are causing considerable strain on families." Financial challenges affect all aspects of pet ownership and care. If more people struggle in this way that also puts additional strain on shelters as animals are returned or surrendered, another reason why robust funding is so imperative to be able to take in these animals, afford them as much attention and comfort as possible, and focus on the best ways to get them out into a home again.

Now, I get those things can be a downer, so why not take a look at all the good that comes from having pets in our lives? 85% of people who own a dog reported reduction in experiencing loneliness, dog ownership lowers our risk of death (through decreases in blood pressure, heart problems, cognitive decline), having a pet increases our social lives which is also something that helps us to live longer. There are endless statistics and stories on how animals uplift and boost our wellbeing which is a huge reason shelters deserve to be properly resourced and financed, because it is not only the animals that are bolstered by this, it is all of us living in this county as well. The money put into MCASAC flows out into the greater community in so many ways including its outreach efforts, and flourishing volunteer program. These things contribute to a populace that is better informed, educated, experienced, healthy, and connected.

Speaking personally, the shelter has played a huge role in making my life more rewarding and fulfilling. I have never met a group as dedicated, passionate, resolved, and kind than the

MCASAC staff as well as its many volunteers. It is a great honor for me to be even a small part of that, but if you extrapolate one person's experience to many more, I hope you can see just why MCASAC needs and is worthy of a budget that truly reflects all it does. Nothing beats seeing the look on an animal's face when they realize they're finally going home, which comes off the backs of so many people putting in their time, energy, and effort to make that happen. Please help them as they continue to deepen and complete the families of Montgomery County.

Thank you.

Please see below for links to all the sources I used to write my testimony:

https://mda.maryland.gov/spay_neuter_program/Pages/Why-Spay-and-Neuter-Is-So-Important.aspx

<https://habri.org/research/mental-health/social-isolation/>

<https://www.operationkindness.org/why-are-animal-shelters-important/>

<https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/CIRCOUTCOMES.119.005554>

<https://mcpress.mayoclinic.org/healthy-aging/boost-your-health-the-benefits-of-having-a-pet/>