

# Maryland SPCA offers cut rate for neutering pit bulls

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Ah, Valentine's Day. Time for candy, flowers, romantic dinners for two, and low-cost spay-neuter programs for pit bulls.

If that sounds just a little incongruous, take it up with the Maryland SPCA. On February 14, the organization rolled out its new program, Pit-Fix, which offers affordable sterilization for pit bulls. The slogan? "Show your pit the love. Neuter him."

Note to men: Uncross your legs and keep reading.

According to the SPCA, pits are the breed most surrendered to the shelter. The reason? Sheer numbers, according to the website. (The only animals more surrendered? Cats).

"We probably received over 200 pit bulls and over 2,000 cats and kittens last year," says Aileen Gabbey, executive director of the Maryland SPCA. "We decided to focus our efforts on pit bulls and cats because they are the animals most abandoned in area shelters."

Call it a pit stop. Maybe just a strike against unplanned breeding or an attempt to have fewer aggressive or wandering dogs around. However it's phrased, the meaning is clear: the SPCA wants help break the breeding cycle, and trade it in for a focus on lifesaving.

The trouble, according to the SPCA, is that many pit bull owners can not afford the cost of spaying or neutering their dogs through local veterinarians. The Maryland SPCA's Pit-Fix program makes it easier for those on a fixed income to spay or neuter their pit bulls.

The program, offered by appointment every Sunday, has \$40 neutering and \$50 spaying services. Bonus round: it also offers vaccines and treatments. Vaccines for bordatella and distemper are \$10 each. Rabies vaccines are \$6 each. Frontline, the external treatment for flea and tick control, is available for \$6. A heartworm test costs \$10, and microchipping (the implantation of a programmed chip containing owner information, which can be scanned and read by shelters, should a pet escape without his collar and tags) costs \$15.

The SPCA site states that pit bull owners who qualify for Pit-Fix are individuals earning less than \$18,000 annually or under \$8.60 per hour or households earning \$35,000 or less a year. Proof of income is required in order to have animals serviced at the SPCA, and can be based on last year's income tax form, Social Security Disability, all W-2 forms for the family, Section 8, Free Lunch, Food Stamps, VA Disability, AFDC or WIC.

Because of their association with dog fights, says Gabbey, "I think people are often frightened of images they've seen on the news about pit bulls."

The SPCA has noted that pit bulls tend to remain in the shelter longer before being adopted, possibly because of the negative connotations.

However, says Gabbey, "neutering a dog does make him less likely to bite. Fixing males and females makes them less likely to wander, too. (Pit bulls) do require an experienced dog owner because of their natural strength and certainly aren't for everyone, but they can make fine pets."

A program offered at the same time at the SPCA is another which seeks to sterilize cats. Owners can qualify under the same standards as the Pit-Fix program. The SPCA, which also sees cats in record numbers, would like to lower the rate of homeless cats and kittens.

Costs for cat services can be grouped according to three plans. The lowest-cost plan is \$30 for either spaying or neutering for one cat. The mid-range plan, which costs \$40, includes spay/neuter, plus FVRCP (a vaccine for a number of different viruses affecting cats) and rabies vaccines. The top-level plan, with all the bells and whistles, is \$55 and includes spay/neuter, FVRCP and rabies vaccines, de-worming, Frontline and the FeLV and FIV tests (the tests used to detect feline leukemia and the feline immunodeficiency virus, sometimes referred to as 'feline AIDS').

All those who qualify for the program, and who want their cats sterilized/immunized must have an appointment.

The SPCA, which is located in Hampden, can be reached for information on both pit bull and cat programs, by e-mailing [fixem@mdspca.org](mailto:fixem@mdspca.org) or calling the organization's spay/neuter line at 410-235-8826, ext. 140.

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