



ASV Statement on Austin Agenda Item 19

The Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) recognizes that the proposed resolution under consideration in Austin, Texas—Agenda Item 19—has prompted strong feelings within the animal welfare community. While policy debates are to be expected, we are particularly concerned by recent public statements made by Austin Pets Alive! (APA!), which misrepresent both the realities of shelter medicine and the challenges faced by municipal shelters and veterinarians.

Since 2019, Austin Animal Center (AAC), the municipal shelter for Austin and Travis County, has been required by law to announce when a pregnant dog or cat is in its care. This allows outside organizations—such as Austin Pets Alive! (APA!)—the opportunity to transfer the animal prior to surgery. The proposed change would allow municipal veterinarians to perform spay/abort procedures on pregnant animals without first announcing the pregnancy to outside organizations.

ASV believes that the decision to perform a spay/abort procedure should rest with the attending veterinarian, based on the animal's condition, available resources, and the community's needs. These decisions should be made promptly to avoid prolonged housing of pregnant animals in already overburdened shelters.

Across the country, shelters are operating beyond their capacity for care, with limited staffing, resources, and placement options. Allowing pregnant animals—particularly cats and large dogs—to give birth in the shelter setting frequently results in additional strain on staff, fosters, and adopters, and worsens overcrowding.

ASV's Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters state:

When animals that are already pregnant are admitted, shelters should prevent birth from occurring in the facility, instead seeking alternatives such as spay or foster care. In almost all cases, it is safe and humane to spay dogs and cats at any stage of pregnancy. Keeping the uterus closed during and following the spay procedure allows the anesthetized fetuses to die humanely without the need for additional barbiturate injections. (p. 38)

The challenges of shelter overpopulation require nuanced, community-specific solutions. ASV supports veterinarians' ability to make timely, humane medical decisions that balance animal welfare with the realities of shelter capacity and resources.

