



Talking points re S489 and its companion bill HD2461

Massachusetts: [S489](#) – An Act protecting research animals (mandatory adoption of research dogs and cats). Filed 1/22/17. Referred to the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture.

- The retirement and adoption of research animals is not a new concept: Massachusetts colleges, universities, hospitals, research institutes and companies already have adoption arrangements and have had them for many years. Our institutions have robust adoption programs in place with private individuals and adoption agencies whom they have vetted and with whom they have established solid relationships.
- This legislation is being marketed as a “feel good” solution in search of a problem. The adoption of research animals is already widely embraced by the research community, and decisions about how and when to do so are handled by highly qualified experts at the research institution.
- Research institutions have carefully developed customized adoption policies for the retirement of dogs and cats. These policies take into account the types of studies the dog or cat has been involved in, whether the dogs or cats, which are purpose bred for research, are suitable for adoption and a host of other factors. Legislation requiring adoption of research dogs and cats may limit the decision-making of the attending veterinarians, and not permit these important factors to be taken into consideration.
- The proposed legislation actually undermines the current successful practice, for several reasons:
 - As written, the bill could disrupt the long-standing adoption relationships that Massachusetts researchers have developed and possibly force them to rely on 3rd-party organizations that they may not know and that may not have the best interests of the dogs and cats or of the research community in mind.
 - As written, the bill would limit to 24 months the amount of time any dog or cat could be part of a research or teaching protocol. This would effectively end certain kinds of research in Massachusetts, in which the research requires more than 2 years of study.
 - And in some cases, the 2-year provision could have the effect of actually increasing the number of dogs and cats in research.
 - Research organizations have a very high success rate in arranging adoptions for qualified animals. Research organization adoption arrangements generally contain provisions on return, so that research dogs and cats don't end up abandoned or in shelters. On the other hand, Massachusetts shelters and animal rescue operations are not required to report their adoption or euthanasia rates, so we have no way of knowing what percentage of their dogs and cats they successfully rehome, what percentage are returned and what percentage are euthanized.
- This bill will produce additional regulatory burden for our research institutions and the State of Massachusetts without providing a single true benefit for our animals

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- S489 requires release to "animal rescue organizations". The implication that our animals need to be "rescued" is false; it plays into misconceptions of how animals are treated in research settings. The dogs and cats in our Massachusetts facilities receive excellent housing, socialization, food and care. Further, shelters and "rescue" organizations do not possess greater expertise, education, or experience than the dedicated veterinarians and animal care staff who are responsible for the daily care of these dogs and cats. These professionals are therefore the most credible entity for managing the safe disposition of their dogs and cats into adoptive homes.
 - "Rescue organization" is defined in the bill as nonprofit organization established for the purpose of rescuing animals in need and finding permanent, adoptive homes for such animals. Our dogs and cats are not "in need" of rescuing.
- Many of the dogs and cats in education in Massachusetts are used in the training of veterinary technicians and animal care technicians, in certificate and associate's degree programs.
- The bill as written is silent on what happens if an adoption agency declines to take an animal. The bill does not state how many agencies must be contacted or over what period of time.