**WHY PETS ARE IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER IN YOUR COMMUNITY:**

**THE “LINK” – Animal Abuse often is a Precursor or Indicator of other abuse/crime:**

* Many school shooters and serial murderers abused animals before moving on to people
* Children’s exposure to animal abuse results in them becoming de-sensitized to violence
* Domestic abusers use pets against their victims for threats/control/manipulation
* Domestic abuse victims will usually not leave their pets behind and leave their abuser
* Child/elder/domestic abuse is often present in the same homes animal abuse is
* Juvenile animal abuse offenders usually go on to commit more violent crimes
* Where there’s dog fighting there are usually other felony offenses such as drugs, weapons and gang-related crime at the scene as well. (Dog fighting is a federal felony that federal agencies (USDA) will help local law enforcement with its investigation & prosecution)
* Children are very often in attendance at dog fights

**Law enforcement’s knowledge of “the Link” helps them identify & prevent crime within today’s modern community policing model, considered the most effective method of law enforcement**

**The FBI now requires animal “incidents” to be reported into NIBRS, requiring that law enforcement partner with animal services/control departments**

**Pet overpopulation decreases the effectiveness of Animal Control officers and Animal Shelter employees** because COMMUNITY DOLLARS are being used to collect, house and feed homeless animals **instead of** being used to promote proper care of pets, funding spay and neuter, and enforcing cruelty laws

**What can you do as leaders in the community to combat homeless pet overpopulation?**

* Encourage a “See something – say something” message across the community with regard to all forms of abuse, including animal abuse and dogfighting
* Support community outreach efforts to teach citizens to care for their pets properly and encourage responsible pet ownership
* Update local ordinances to encourage spay and neuter, responsible pet ownership and to discourage breeding without a state license
* Support spay and neuter services for local low-income pet owners to reduce pet overpopulation
* Use Georgia’s Companion Animal Protection Laws when appropriate to prosecute illegal animal abuse consistently and fairly

**ABBREVIATED SUMMARY OF GEORGIA STATE ANIMAL CRUELTY LAW:**

 **2018 Georgia Code § 16-12-4. Cruelty to animals**

 **A person commits the MISDEMEANOR offense of cruelty to animals when he or she:**

* Causes physical pain, suffering, or death to an animal by any unjustifiable act or omission; or
* fails to provide to such animal adequate food, water, sanitary conditions, or ventilation that is consistent with what a reasonable person of ordinary knowledge would believe is the normal requirement and feeding habit for such animal's size, species, breed, age, and physical condition.

 **A person commits the FELONY offense of aggravated cruelty to animals when he or she:**

* Maliciously causes the death of an animal; causes physical harm, tortures an animal by the infliction of or subjection to severe or prolonged physical pain; administers poison to an animal,
* maliciously fails to provide to such animal adequate food, water, sanitary conditions, or ventilation that is consistent with what a reasonable person of ordinary knowledge would believe is the normal requirement and feeding habit for such animal's size, species, breed, age, and physical condition to the extent that the death of such animal results or a member of its body is rendered useless or is seriously disfigured.

Any person convicted of the offense of aggravated cruelty to animals shall be guilty of a felony and shall be punished by imprisonment for not less than one nor more than five years, a fine not to exceed $15,000.00, or both; … upon the second or subsequent conviction of aggravated cruelty to animals shall be punished by imprisonment for not less than one nor more than ten years, a fine not to exceed $100,000.00, or both.

(Before sentencing a defendant for any conviction under this Code section, the sentencing judge may require psychological evaluation of the offender and shall consider the entire criminal record of the offender.

**GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT COMPANION ANIMAL OVERPOPULATION COMES WITH THESE RISKS:**

* **INCREASED SHELTER COSTS**
* **INCREASED ANIMAL CONTROL DEPARTMENT COSTS**
* **SHELTER INTAKES/HUMAN POPULATION PERCENTAGE SHOULD = ONLY TEMPORARILY LOST ANIMALS OR ANIMALS SURRENDERED DUE TO A PET OWNER’S RARE UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES, PERHAPS 1%**
* **BAD PRESS ASSOCIATED WITH PUPPY MILL BUSTS**
* **BAD PRESS ASSOCIATED WITH HOARDING CASES**
* **BAD PRESS ASSOCIATED WITH CRUELTY CASES**
* **BAD PRESS ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH EUTHANASIA RATES OR “HIGH KILL”**