

EDITORIAL

Unlicensed dogs add to towns' costs

Fees cover only small portion of animal control expenses.

In addition to the veterinarian and food bills, dogs come with a hidden cost that is shared by all Connecticut's taxpayers. Only three state towns make money on their pooches. The remaining 166 cities and towns end up in the red for animal control costs that are shifted to taxpayers, according to a study by the Yankee Institute.



Milford, according to 2008 figures reported to the state Department of Agriculture, ended the deepest in the hole. After the state took its share of licensing fees, Milford had to take \$346,000 from tax revenues to pay animal control costs.



Because not all dogs are licensed, the cost of dog ownership is even higher for municipal taxpayers. There are 211,524 licensed dogs in Connecticut, according to figures towns report to the state. That works out to only 16 percent of state households. This is half the national average of dog ownership.

In 2008, Hartford had only 363 licensed dogs, although it has more than 44,000 households. New Haven had 613 licensed dogs with 47,000 households. In contrast, Stamford, which has 45,399 households, had 2,417 licensed dogs.

The inescapable conclusion is that many state dog owners have not licensed their pets and have added to their town's animal control costs.

The annual license fee is \$8 for a neutered dog, \$19 for a dog that has not been fixed. The money is split between the town and the state Department of Agriculture. In 2008, dog owners paid almost \$2.5 million in license and other fees, of which about \$1.18 million went to the state. Cities and towns' animal control costs totaled \$9.3 million.

Not all animal control costs are related to dogs, although, because of their numbers, dogs receive the most attention.

The Yankee Institute's analysis casts light on a frequently overlooked municipal expense. It suggests that some towns could substantially increase their revenue by enforcing the licensing requirement. Readjusting the revenue split between municipalities and the state would help local budgets. Although the Yankee Institute, a think tank with a conservative bent, does not suggest it, an increase in the license fee seems in order to cover animal control costs.