

To the Public Safety and Health Committee,

My name is Lauren Zimmer. I am a multi-certified professional trainer (CPDT-KA, IAABC Shelter Behavior Affiliate, IAABC Parrot Behavior Consultant) and a disability activist who works every day with disabled handlers, service dog teams, therapy dog teams, and pet-owning families throughout Milwaukee. I am writing to express serious concerns about File #250028.

I want to state plainly that this ordinance, as written, will increase MADACC's intake rather than reduce it. The mandates around microchipping, sterilization, pet limits, fancier permits, and complicated compliance rules will add pressure to families who are already struggling. When people cannot meet new requirements because of cost, transportation barriers, or lack of access to veterinary care, the result is predictable. Pets are surrendered, abandoned, or seized. That is exactly the situation MADACC is already overwhelmed with.

More intake means more euthanasia. MADACC is the only open-admission shelter in Milwaukee. When intake rises faster than animals can leave the building, euthanasia rises with it. The city can avoid saying it out loud, but that is the reality. Criminalizing noncompliance instead of supporting families will lead to outcomes no one claims to want.

This ordinance also disproportionately harms low income and disabled residents. Many of the people I work with rely on their pets to navigate daily life. These individuals often cannot afford sudden requirements like mandatory microchipping fees, veterinary certificates for accidental litters, strict sterilization timelines, population-management plans, or the steep fines for noncompliance. These are not uncaring pet owners. They are people who face real barriers and are doing their best with limited resources. Punishing poverty and disability is not humane policy.

Even though the ordinance removes breed specific language, it still ends up targeting certain types of dogs and their owners. Large breed dogs are subjected to additional leash rules, fencing expectations, and containment requirements that will hit renters and marginalized communities the hardest. Calling it "size based regulation" does not change the fact that it recreates the same inequities as past breed focused ordinances.

There is also the emotional and psychological harm that comes with removing animals from homes for financial reasons. I work with disabled and neurodivergent clients whose pets are essential to their mental health, stability, and daily functioning. Taking an animal away from someone because they cannot afford a fee or a deadline is not trauma informed. It can cause real and lasting harm.

This proposal also creates a maze of paperwork, permits, certificates, deadlines, and reports. It is extremely easy for an ordinary person to fall out of compliance even when they have no harmful intent. Creating a system where everyday pet owners can become lawbreakers over administrative issues does not improve animal welfare. It simply makes pet ownership inaccessible to people who do not have the money, time, or capacity to navigate a complicated regulatory structure.

On top of that, the ordinance would require many to purchase fancier permits. This raises an obvious question about manpower. MADACC and city departments are already stretched. Who will carry out these inspections? How often? With what staffing? Adding new obligations without the capacity to follow through guarantees either uneven enforcement or no enforcement, both of which undermine the credibility of the ordinance.

And perhaps most importantly, this ordinance directly contradicts MADACC's own stated mission of keeping animals in their homes. If the goal is to reduce intake, strengthen families, and support animal welfare, then adding financial and procedural obstacles does the opposite. It creates fear which reduces engagement with animal services, and pushes more people and animals into crisis.

I encourage the Committee to reject this ordinance in its current form. There are better ways to improve animal welfare that do not tear pets away from the people who love them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lauren Zimmer

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Disability Activist and Professional Animal Trainer

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