American Association of Veterinary Anatomists

**Official Position Statement on Cat and Dog Cadaver
Procurement for Teaching Veterinary Professional Students**

This document from the American Association of Veterinary Anatomists presents reasons for and concerns about the availability of dog and cat cadavers for use in veterinary schools. The Association does not condone the euthanasia of dogs and cats strictly for teaching purposes nor any sort of financial incentive to do so.

The intrinsic value of cadaver dissection as the primary means of teaching veterinary anatomy has been long recognized and periodically re-confirmed by those responsible for the core training of veterinary students. Although modern modalities, including computer-assisted learning and the use of plastinated specimens have supplemented dissection, the depth of knowledge expected at the DVM level is still dependent on the careful dissection of cadavers— there is no satisfactory substitute. Dissection is critical to obtain knowledge of tissue dynamics, to understand three-dimensional relationships of structures, allow students to make anatomical mistakes without consequence and to the application of diagnostic and surgical procedures.

We, the members of the AAVA, wholeheartedly support efforts to minimize the numbers of dogs and cats euthanized in North America. Great strides have led to a dramatic reduction in the numbers of euthanized dogs and cats from more than 12 million per year in the 1970s to an estimated three to four million today. We support all efforts to reduce these numbers even further. Unfortunately, large numbers of dogs and cats will continue to be euthanized for various reasons for the foreseeable future. We believe it is not only acceptable, but desirable, to use euthanized dogs and cats for training veterinarians rather than simply disposing of them via municipal landfills or incineration. After all, it is veterinarians, by promoting animal health and performing procedures to prevent pet overpopulation, that can have a tangible impact on reducing shelter intake and euthanasia rates.

Colleges of veterinary medicine currently obtain their dog and cat cadavers from one or a combination of three sources: licensed commercial dealers that are allowed access to freshly euthanized animals from various municipal and county animal shelters, direct donations of euthanized or animals condemned to be euthanized from shelters, or a willed body program in which clients donate the bodies of pets euthanized for medical reasons. We recognize that no single solution works for every veterinary college and fully support all three as viable means of acquiring cadavers for veterinary anatomy instruction. However, we only support the use of cadavers from dogs and cats euthanized for reasons unrelated to their use as teaching specimens. Further, we do not support the transfer of funds to shelters or veterinarians which would incentivize the euthanasia of animals for

monetary gain. Shelter animals used for anatomical instruction should represent those that were not or could not be selected for adoption, and whose bodies were otherwise destined for disposal by incineration or burial. As stated above, none of these animals should be euthanized for the intended purpose of providing specimens for dissection, and no burden for procurement of specimens should be placed on the shelter.

In summary, the American Association of Veterinary Anatomists strongly encourages and promotes the continued release of animal bodies from various municipal or county animal shelters to educational institutions and licensed commercial dealers so long as the following procedures are followed:

(1) That procurement be limited to non-adopted and non-adoptable animals that have been euthanized, checked and pronounced dead by the qualified shelter personnel or a licensed veterinarian or acquired under an approved university IACUC protocol.

(2) That no payment to the shelter be made which would in any way provide a financial incentive for the shelter to ever choose euthanasia over adoption.