

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Humane Society of Berks County Helps Pet Owners Overcome Bad Economy by Expanding Low-Cost Veterinary Services**

The Humane Society of Berks County (HSBC), the leader in animal welfare, announced that it has expanded its sliding scale veterinary services plan in order to allow more pet owners to ensure that their pets get the medical care they need but may not be able to afford. The expanded plan will now cover more people and offers pet owners the same high quality medical care but at discounts of up to 33%, with 50% discounts available on certain services. “In this shaky economy, we know that some people are making the choice to provide needed medical care for their pets based on their financial situation. Even worse, some are being forced to give up their pet to a shelter because they can’t provide their pet with the most basic health care,” said Karel Minor, Humane Society Executive Director. “The Humane Society is determined to help these people keep their pets safe and healthy where they belong- at home with the family that loves them.”

The services provided under the sliding scale offer the same high standard of care that any other pet owner receives and no corners are cut or quality diminished. The sliding scale discounts are needs based and are available to any and all who qualify and request them. The billing rate for clients is based on the Federal Poverty Rate designation. Individuals or families earning 150% the Federal Poverty Rate or less will receive across the board discounts ranging from 10% to 33%, with some services being discounted by up to 50%. For example, a family of four earning \$31,800 (150% of Federal Poverty Rate) would be eligible for a 10% discount and a family of four earning \$21,200 (100% of Federal Poverty Rate) would be eligible for a 33% or more discount. Participants in the program must complete an application and verify income status.

Sliding scale services had previously been offered during limited hours and excluded some services. The new program applies to nearly all services and hours at both of the Humane Society’s Veterinary Hospitals (Reading and Douglassville). “Many vets and animals shelters offer limited low cost services to help “poor” pet owners,” said Minor. “What we began to see

with increasing frequency were the pet owners who had previously done everything that was required for their pets and could afford it, suddenly being faced with denying medical care to their pets because they are the victim of a universally terrible economy.” Minor said the Humane Society needed to find a way to provide universal access to needed services that was responsive to the needs of the animals, the financial capabilities of the non-profit organization, and the financial reality facing so many people. “This isn’t about rich or poor or who loves their pet more,” said Minor. “This is about having an alternative for anyone who loves their pets to give them the care they need and deserve. We know that it could be any of us facing these decisions right now.”

Income guidelines and application information can be found on the Humane Society’s website ([www.berkshumane.org](http://www.berkshumane.org)) under Vet Services. The program is open to anyone who feels they may need additional help providing care for their pet including those on fixed incomes, the unemployed, those on social security or welfare, or others in short or long-term economic distress. For those who cannot afford even these reduced rates offered under this program may still take advantage of the regularly offered vaccination and micro-chipping clinics offered by the HSBC, which offer basic vaccinations but no other veterinary services.

It is the Humane Society of Berks County’s hope that the expansion of services such as these will help caring pet owners avoid turning animals in to shelters where they may face euthanasia. “For one hundred years animal shelters have been *reacting* to the waves of animals entering shelters only to be euthanized,” said Minor. “It is time for us to stop wringing our hands and start attacking the root causes of animal relinquishment and abandonment. This program is one more way in which the Humane Society is doing that.”

The Humane Society of Berks County serves all of Berks County and surrounding communities. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania’s animal cruelty laws for all of Berks County, the Humane Society provides adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, veterinary services to the general public, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society is located at 1801 N. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Reading, and 1201 Ben Franklin Highway E., Douglassville.

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