



A Dog Law that Sounds Good Can be Bad for Cats

During the first months of every year state legislatures introduce hundreds of animal related bills. Some of these will affect you and your animals in ways in which you would never anticipate. A few may sound good but later be amended with provisions detrimental to pet ownership or breeding of pedigreed cats. The time is now to gain an understanding of the hot cat or dog topics in your own state so that you can influence your state lawmakers and provide information. As experts with informed input you can often prevent poorly written or ill-conceived bills from gaining co-sponsors or support. Look online for the committee hearing schedules and talk with lawmaker's staff assistants, preferably in their offices, prior to the hearing to build a relationship.

Each year different issues seem to move to the forefront on the state level. Currently large organizations that consider all breeding of pedigreed cats and purebred dogs to be exploitive or taking homes away from shelter animals are attempting to stop all breeding by passing what they call "puppy mill" laws. Activists are clever at using emotional terminology to influence lawmakers and gain public appeal for proposals. Most people are concerned about any abuse or neglect of animals in breeding facilities. However, they also would not want to see pedigreed cat breeds become extinct. There is little understanding of why a law that supposedly prevents dogs from cruelty in a substandard kennel could possibly mean the end of Persian cats or Maine Coons as pets.

Animal rights activists who oppose breeding of cats/dogs to preserve breeds do not present a State law entitled "The Stop All Breeding Act". They instead promote legislation claimed to end what they label "puppy mills". And a bill will most likely have a name such as "The Pet Quality Assurance and Protection Act" (Oklahoma 2009-2010) or "The Puppymill Cruelty Prevention Act" (Missouri 2010). Campaigns are developed for these proposed state laws that bring to mind visions of deplorable conditions for dogs bred and housed in commercial kennels. Supporters show sick or abused dogs in photos on websites. The bills are aggressively promoted and financially backed by large and wealthy national animal organizations with lobbying, public relations and media savvy. They will usually set the animal thresholds high enough to keep hobby breeders from objecting. Often they will only cover dog facilities. This helps avoid cat fancy opposition and once they achieve passage they can always make the inevitable "and cat" amendment.

Certainly all animal lovers, including cat fanciers, abhor any animal cruelty or neglect. Everyone disapproves of kennels that mistreat dogs. Therefore it is difficult to explain to lawmakers and the general public why we do not support breeder licensing legislation that is said to end "puppy mills". The term, "puppy mill" is not legally defined, but the public

associates images of cruelty to the language. In recent years animal rights activists often use the term to describe anyone who breeds dogs regardless of the care or treatment of the animals or the number a breeder keeps. Sometimes they will refer to cat breeders as “kitten factories”.

These anti-breeding laws may sound good but they eventually impact most breeders including those who are conscientious, forcing some very good commercial breeders out of business and small home-based breeders to give up breeding.

The proposals usually have husbandry requirements that are either more stringent or different from the requirements of the USDA so a federally licensed commercial breeder would have to greatly modify their facility at huge cost or face penalties. Home-based breeders of cats usually allow their cats and kittens to have free access to living rooms or bedrooms. These bills have requirements for housing materials to be impervious to moisture making environments with carpeting and home furniture impossible. Stipulated high or low temperatures can actually be harmful for neonatal puppies or kittens who need a very warm room or for breeds that thrive in lower temperatures. Some laws limit cats to only one litter per year when breeding frequency should be determined by a breeder with veterinary advice and not by laws. Many cats of certain breeds come into heat every 2 weeks if not bred and will develop uterine infections or loss of condition if repeatedly held off from mating.

There are general objections to the anti-breeding laws that should be brought to lawmakers’ attention before they consider a bill said to rid their State of animal cruelty and neglect.

- **Commercial breeding of cats is extremely rare.** Most state “puppy mill” proposals only cover dog facilities but others include cat breeders. Large or substandard catteries are not prevalent anywhere since it is nearly impossible to house large numbers of cats successfully and maintain a profitable business very long. Cats are susceptible to upper respiratory and other infectious diseases that make commercial breeding a nightmare and economic profit impossible. Cat breeding is almost entirely a small home-based hobby activity by people who work to improve their chosen breed at great expense rather than with a profit expectation. This is true for most dog breeders as well.
- **Animal welfare or the quality of care in breeding facilities has no relationship to the arbitrary numbers of dogs/cats** put in these laws to determine who must be regulated and inspected. Laws have passed with a threshold of 50 dogs that in later years have been revised to eventually include breeders who sell only two litters per year. Small breeders are unable to pay the high fees, comply with unreasonable record keeping requirements and penalties. These individuals have no “open for business” hours and resent state inspectors coming to their homes unannounced. Breeder licensing is similar to warrantless searches of private homes. Some of the best small breeders simply discontinue raising fine pedigreed cats or purebred dogs. The consequence means the public then loses the optimum source of home raised puppies and kittens with good health and temperament.
- **In all States there are well enforced animal cruelty and neglect laws.** The very fact that there are photos and examples of poor facilities on the “puppy mill”

- campaign websites is because kennels have been discovered, investigations have led to convictions and these businesses were forced to comply with the existing laws.
- **The federal Animal Welfare Act already provides licensing and inspection of commercial animal facilities** that sell any dogs and cats at wholesale to pet stores or brokers. Commercial kennels that sell some dogs directly to the public will almost always also sell at wholesale too and therefore must have USDA inspection. CFA supports sufficient funding and further strengthening of the USDA enforcement efforts.
 - **Truly large breeding kennels with hundreds of dogs cannot hide** except in rural parts of the country. Inevitably there will be complaints in the community if facilities are “bad” when sales are direct to the public. If any sales are wholesale then brokers or pet stores who do not want sick pets avoid these sources encouraging compliance with the Animal Welfare Act.
 - **Hoarding of cats or dogs is a rare but serious mental illness** that is not affected by breeder facility laws.

In the past few years we have monitored some bad anti-breeder laws and openly opposed several with the dog fanciers and pet industry. Once the legislators understand they usually will not vote for these laws. However, bad laws always need to have a groundswell of public opposition to prevent passage especially when on the surface they seem to be helping animals.

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