

Dog Owners Rally to Support Tougher Dog Law

Proposed Pennsylvania bills tackle breeding practices, surgical practices, and cruelty penalties.

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Nearly 100 supporters and a dozen dogs gathered Wednesday on the Capitol steps in Harrisburg, Pa., at a rally for stiffer dog laws. Three newly introduced bills would raise the minimum standards for commercial dog kennels, defined as breeders that sell dogs to a dealer or pet shop or that sell more than 60 dogs per year, according to Chris Ryder, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture spokesman.

“We’re raising the bar,” Ryder said. “The people who are keeping dogs in small cages, stacked one on top of another, and who don’t provide dogs with adequate opportunities to get out, they will have to make changes if this legislation is passed.”

The first of the bills, House Bill 2525, requires increased cage space, solid flooring, and access to an outdoor exercise area twice the size of the dog’s primary quarters. The legislation would also mandate annual veterinary care, and eliminate the stacking of cages for adult dogs.

“A lot of people in Pennsylvania are doing the right thing,” Ryder said, “however, too many aren’t meeting the minimum requirements.”

The second bill, House Bill 2532, would target surgical practices such as debarking, the cutting or destroying of a dog’s vocal cords. This would only be allowed by a veterinarian, as would Caesarean birth. In addition, tail docking would be allowed by individual owners until the dog is 3 days old, after which point it must be done by a veterinarian. If done at all, Ryder said, such procedures should only be performed by a veterinarian.

House Bill 399 increases fines for animal cruelty and requires owners of dogs seized for cruelty to pay for the cost of caring for a dog while at a humane society or animal shelter – or surrender ownership of the dog.

“Any person that cares about dogs would probably say that’s not enough,” he said about the state’s dog law. “We need more.”

The proposed legislation is a result of Gov. Edward G. Rendell’s push to change living conditions for dogs in Pennsylvania kennels. Since 2006, Rendell has worked on the staffing and enforcement efforts of the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement, which oversees the inspection and licensing of kennels.