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Secretary of Agriculture Recognizes Benefits of Kennel Inspections for Quality Dog Breeders, Consumers

Harrisburg, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding reminds the public that the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement provides a useful tool for consumers considering getting a puppy or boarding a dog.

The [Kennel Inspections Search](#) allows anyone to see the most recent dog warden inspection reports on local kennels. It is searchable by county, kennel or kennel owner name, city or ZIP code.

“This simple to use inspection search assures that consumers understand the condition of kennels they do business with,” Redding said. “Whether choosing a breeder providing a new puppy, or searching for a kennel to board your dog, you want to work with a reputable kennel. The kennel inspection search helps consumers make informed decisions.”

The value of this service to both Pennsylvania consumers and small business breeders is in jeopardy, as the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement faces insolvency without a legislative fix to raise the dog license fee.

By law, Pennsylvania dog wardens perform a minimum of two unannounced inspections per year on licensed kennels. These inspections provide an opportunity for wardens to ensure proper living conditions and to check on the overall well-being of the dogs that live there. Because dog wardens are the only officials allowed to enter kennels without a search warrant, they are the first line of defense to discover cruelty, neglect or sickness. If poor conditions are found, wardens involve humane society police officers or other authorities.

“In previous years, kennels were visited even more frequently than the required twice a year,” said Kristen Donmoyer, director of the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement. “This was to keep kennel owners in check, ensuring they were not violating their license type or class, and to keep a better eye on operations that were bordering on violation or showed signs of being problematic.”

The Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement is funded mostly through the sale of dog licenses, but it can no longer support itself; the license fee has not been increased in 25 years.

The bureau has been forced to make tough financial decisions including keeping some dog warden positions vacant and conducting fewer kennel inspections. Currently, 46 dog wardens are covering Pennsylvania’s 67 counties.

“Recently one of our dog wardens inspected a kennel and found it was not up to its usual standards,” Donmoyer said. “The operator explained that he thought, due to COVID, we were not inspecting. It shows how quickly conditions devolve without inspections.”

Donmoyer and Fred Strathmeyer, the department's deputy secretary of Plant Industry and Consumer Protection, today visited Creekside Aussies, a small hobby breeding kennel in Lebanon County.

"I fell in love with the Australian shepherd because of trainability and their adoration of their people," said Creekside Aussies owner Sarah Martin. "I became a breeder to share the joy of these wonderful dogs with other families, and to give puppies the best start in life possible. This is my passion, and as a small business owner I rely on quality inspections from the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement. The bureau's work helps breeders like me continue to improve the dog breeding industry in Pennsylvania."

Small kennel businesses depend on frequent kennel inspections and industry regulation to keep standards high, verify their good reputation, and to help shut down bad kennels.

Although the number of kennels keeps growing, dog wardens are spread thin, so they are conducting fewer inspections. That puts dogs at risk.

Normally, dog wardens serve neighborhoods across Pennsylvania by capturing dogs running at large, helping dog owners track down a runaway best friend, and investigating dog attacks to provide justice for victims. These services are in addition to their mandated work to inspect nearly 3,000 kennels and breeding operations in Pennsylvania.

Since its enactment in 1893, enforcement of the dog law has been funded through the sale of dog licenses. Now taxpayer dollars are being redirected to the bureau to keep the minimum mandated services up and running. For the 2020-21 budget year the bureau accepted a supplemental transfer of taxpayer dollars in the amount of \$1.2 million. Another \$1.5 million is proposed for 2021-22. Taxpayer dollars are now paying for dog-related services at the local government level too, as wardens become more strained and calls for strays and dogs at large default to local services.

State Senator Judy Schwank (D-Berks) and State Representative Eddie Day Pashinski (D-Luzerne) have introduced two corresponding pieces of legislation, [Senate Bill 232](#) and [House Bill 526](#), to raise the dog license fee by a minimal amount that would adequately fund the bureau to continue protecting both dogs and the public in Pennsylvania.

The proposed fee increase is in line with standard inflation and will fund the work of wardens to ensure humane treatment of dogs and investigation and tracking of dangerous dogs.

A minimal fee increase – for example for a spayed/neutered dog would increase from \$6.50 to \$10 annually – will benefit Pennsylvanians at large. The bills will also require puppies to be licensed at 8 weeks, the same age they are legally allowed to be sold. This is expected to increase license sales of puppies and further stabilize the bureau.

Without immediate action of passing a fee increase, the frequency of kennel inspections will decrease. This will put both consumers and Pennsylvania's small businesses at risk.

For more information of Pennsylvania's dog laws, visit agriculture.pa.gov or licenseyourdogpa.pa.gov.

Note: Photo and video from the event available at PAcast.com.

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