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Ag Secretary, Dauphin County Treasurer Call for Practical Solution to Crisis Impacting PA Dogs, Local Government Finances

Harrisburg, PA – Today, Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding joined Dauphin County Treasurer Janis Creason and Executive Director Humane Society of Harrisburg Area and Federated Humane Societies of Pennsylvania President Amy Kaunas to detail a crisis impacting dogs in Pennsylvania kennels, the families who adopt them, and the strain placed on local government finances by underfunded dog license fees creating the crisis.

“Pennsylvanians love our dogs,” said Redding. “And Pennsylvania’s dog law sets some of the highest standards in the nation to protect them. But laws are worthless without adequate funding and personnel to enforce them.

“We have a funding problem with an easy solution. And it would cost Pennsylvania dog owners about the same as a cup of coffee. That’s one cup of coffee a year to protect the dogs we all love.”

As a direct result of the legislature’s failure to act on a dog license fee increase, the bureau is unable to fill mission-critical dog warden vacancies and keep up with even minimum inspection requirements. Responses to dangerous dog incidents and dogs running loose are slowed and often fall to local law enforcement, stressing their personnel and finances.

“When I embarked on my career as a county treasurer, I was surprised to learn my office issued dog licenses,” said Creason. “Initially I didn’t approach the task with much enthusiasm. In time, I came to appreciate the tremendous amount of taxpayer dollars that could be saved at the municipal level if dogs were licensed.

“Handling lost dogs is expensive for municipalities and robs law enforcement of valuable time and energy. My office reunites lost dogs with their owners at least three or four times a week. Besides being a very nice thing to do, our ability to quickly identify a dog’s owner saves valuable resources at the shelters and police departments. Without the Bureau of Dog Law, local government will be faced with impossible decisions.”

Dog wardens ensure that kennel owners are held accountable for maintaining adequate living conditions and protection from the spread of disease. As small businesses, kennel operators rely on quality inspections and reports to show consumers their kennel is a good place to buy a puppy or adopt a dog.

Dog wardens also provide key support in animal neglect and cruelty investigations, as they can enter kennels without a search warrant to follow up on complaints, an ability humane police officers and local law enforcement do not have. The bureau also reimburses shelters for

housing unlicensed strays, but the amount of support per animal has dropped from \$40 to \$5, putting added strain on nonprofit shelter operators.

“I am honored to host Secretary Redding and his team to highlight the important role the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement plays in protecting the welfare of dogs in the commonwealth,” said Kaunus. “We encourage every Pennsylvanian to educate themselves on the challenges the bureau is now facing and help advocate for the dogs of Pennsylvania.”

For several years the Department of Agriculture has pushed for a minimal dog license fee increase to keep the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement funded to continue their work to crack down on illegal kennels, register and track dangerous dogs, and ensure the health and well-being of dogs in PA, but the legislature has not heeded that warning.

With the funding shortage, taxpayer dollars are being redirected to the bureau to keep the minimum mandated services up and running. Governor Tom Wolf’s proposed budget includes a supplemental transfer of \$1.2 million for 2020-21 in addition to a transfer for 2021-22 of \$1.5 million. These funds are coming from all taxpayers, rather than a small fee that is a built-in responsibility of dog ownership.

State Senator Judy Schwank (D-Berks) and State Representative Eddie Day Pashinski (D-Luzerne) have introduced two bills to rectify these issues. [Senate Bill 232](#) and [House Bill 526](#) would raise the dog license fee by a minimal amount to adequately fund the bureau to continue protecting animal and human health and safety in Pennsylvania.

The bills, which have growing bipartisan support, propose an increased license fee for most dog owners from \$6.50 to \$10 annually. They also require puppies to be licensed at eight weeks — the age they are legally allowed to be sold or adopted — a shift from the current standard of 12 weeks. This is expected to increase license sales by raising dog-owner awareness of their responsibility to buy a license.

For more information on dog licenses and Pennsylvania’s dog law, visit licenseyourdogpa.pa.gov. For more about the critical need to increase the dog license fee read the [2020 Annual Report](#) for the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement and visit agriculture.pa.gov/raisethefee4papups.

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