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Secretary of Agriculture, Second Lady, Legislators Urge Pennsylvanians to Be the Voice for PA Pups

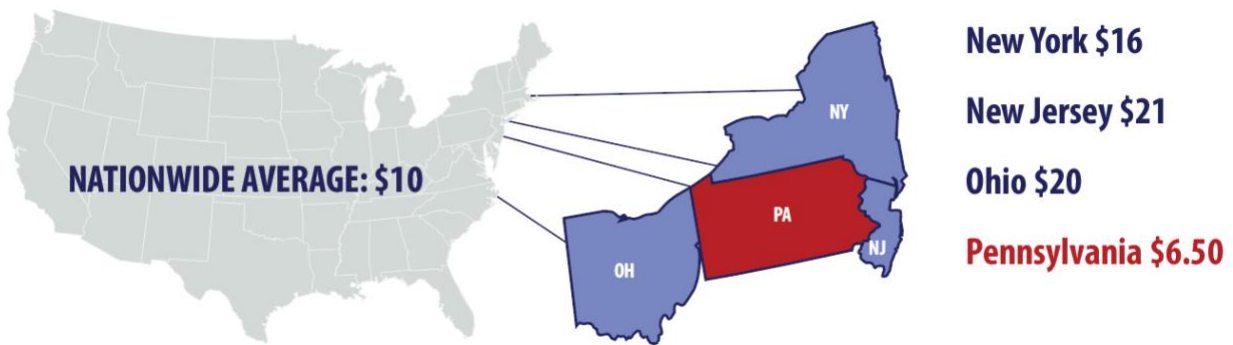
Outdated license fees pose risk to wellbeing of dogs, legislative solution needs support

Harrisburg, PA – Joined by Second Lady Gisele Fetterman and Levi Fetterman, the Fetterman family dog, Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and dog law advocates Senator Judy Schwank and Representative Eddie Day Pashinski rallied at the Capitol today calling on Pennsylvanians to ask [their legislator](#) to save the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement and their invaluable work by supporting [Senate Bill 232](#) and [House Bill 526](#).

The Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement works to crack down on illegal puppy mills and kennels, ensure the health and welfare of dogs living in breeding kennels and throughout Pennsylvania, inspect licensed kennels to ensure proper standards, monitor and track dangerous dogs, investigate dog bites and provide justice to victims, investigate attacks on livestock and provide indemnification to farmers, and reunite lost dogs with families or help them find shelter until they find a new forever home. This work is at significant risk as they've been unable to fill critical warden vacancies across the commonwealth and are barely able to keep up with minimum mandated requirements due to a funding crisis created by inaction to raise the dog license fee – which has been the same for more than 25 years – that funds their work.

"We're here today to ask anyone in Pennsylvania who loves dogs and wants neighborhoods across the commonwealth to remain safe to contact your legislator and ask them to save the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement," said Redding. "We've been warning this day would come – when the bureau runs out of money and services are at risk – for years. Dog licenses cost less than the cost of a chew toy. Our neighboring states charge up to \$20 and the national average for an annual license is \$10.

"Joining us today are dog lovers and advocates from around the state who have said they want to increase the fee – they want dogs to be loved and healthy and happy, they want lost dogs to have a chance to come home, they want protection for the dogs who spend their life in a kennel, and they want dog bite victims to have someone advocating for them and dangerous dogs to not roam the streets. If you want this too, call your legislator," added Redding.



Outdated license fees pose risk to wellbeing of dogs

All dogs three months and older are required to be licensed, the cost of an annual license has been \$6.50 since 1996. And since 1893, the enforcement of the dog law has been funded through the sale of dog licenses. Services related to dogs have never been paid for by taxpayers until now. To keep minimum mandated services up and running, taxpayer dollars are now being directed to the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement to the tune of more than \$1 million annually. 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.

For several years, the department has been pushing for a minimal dog license fee increase to keep the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement funded to continue their work.

"It breaks my heart to think of the abused and neglected dogs that could be overlooked without proper enforcement," said Second Lady Gisele Fetterman. "Our pup, Levi, was chained outside for the first two years of his life. He was rescued because the resources were there to save him."

Since 1996, the human population has increased by 5 percent and the dog population has increased by an estimated 7 percent. The number of kennels the bureau regulates has increased by 19 percent and the number of kennel inspections has increased by 85 percent as a result of legislative changes in 2008. Operating costs for the bureau have more than doubled to keep up with the increase in dogs and kennels. Meanwhile, the bureau is working with 14 less dog wardens than were staffed in 1996, a decrease of 30 percent. Without immediate legislative action to increase the cost of a dog license – minimally and in-line with inflation – taxpayer dollars will continue to be necessary.

SB 232 and HB 526 support funding to protect dogs

Advocates for the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement 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 and adequately fund the bureau.

"So many people across the Commonwealth view their dogs as family. Right now, we aren't doing enough at the state level to ensure their safety," said Schwank. "A modest dog licensing increase would allow the underfunded Dog Law Enforcement Bureau to provide the kind of oversight we need to make sure our canine friends are safe and healthy."

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 or the same age they are legally allowed to be sold. This efficiency is expected to increase license sales for puppies by providing education at the point of sale and will further stabilize the bureau.

"A reasonable dog license fee increase is the most logical solution to solving the issues facing the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement by restoring funding without needing to use taxpayer dollars," Pashinski said. "House Bill 526 and Senate Bill 232 would do just that, saving taxpayers millions of dollars, restoring the resources necessary for our dog wardens to safeguard dogs in commercial breeding kennels, protect the public from dangerous dogs, help reunite stray dogs with their families, and much more. You can do all of this by simply raising that fee by about a penny a day."

What's [at stake](#) and how to help:

- The health and wellbeing of dogs in kennels, they face [horrific conditions](#) without the eyes and ears of dog wardens;
- [Risk of increase in sick puppies](#) and heartache or, worse, [health risk](#) for buyers;
- [Dangerous dogs at large and lack of justice](#) for those who suffer from dog attacks;
- [Increased cost and workload](#) for local governments;
- [Kennel inspections and accountability](#) for quality dog breeders;
- [Diligence with taxpayer dollars](#);
- Risk for an [increase in illegal puppy mills](#); and
- [Irreparable loss for farmers](#) who experience loss of livestock from dog and coyote attacks.

Pennsylvanians are encouraged to be the voice for PA pups and become part of the solution by [contacting their legislators](#) and asking them to support SB 232 and HB 526.

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.

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

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