

MO 2013 Legislative Session Ends!

May 17, 2013

ALL ANIMALS ARE SAFE!

Missouri Legislature is out of session

Miraculously, the animals have escaped virtually unscathed despite an onslaught of harmful bills this year in the state legislature that attempted to roll back state laws mandating the humane treatment of animals. What was particularly disturbing was the fact that many of these harmful bills passed the House of Representatives overwhelmingly and came very close to passing into law. It was an arduous effort, and sometimes it seemed like an all-out war, to amend or defeat these bills to protect the animals. In fact, some of the bills that would have taken away safeguards against inhumane factory farming practices were still viable the night before the session ended. It was only because of our perseverance and refusal to back down that we were able to defeat these bills in the late hours of the night.

Every one of your letters, emails, and phone calls to your state senators paid off.

All of you who reached out to your legislator can feel very proud because you truly made a difference for every animal in the state.

Here is a list of some of the bills that you helped to successfully amend or defeat to ensure the welfare of animals in Missouri.

HJR 11 Right to Farm

Most notable of these dangerous bills was HJR 11 which was titled innocuously enough as, "Right to Farm." As it originated, it would have rolled back our prohibition on cockfighting as well as jeopardize the recently enacted Canine Cruelty Prevention Act. Representative Chris Kelly accurately proclaimed it to be a "back door repeal of the puppy mill law." We were fortunate to have it amended in the House to protect all current laws on animal welfare. As it went to the Senate, we were again fortunate to have it amended in Committee to protect local control of factory farms. Later, when it reached the Senate floor, several senators stood up to filibuster the bill which resulted in an amendment to protect future ballot initiatives.

While a Conference Committee of legislators approved the amendment to protect the right of citizens to vote on animal welfare issues, this same Committee stripped out protections for local control of factory farms. When it came back to the Senate, the same heroic senators stood up again and filibustered over the issue of local control. As a result, local control was inserted back into HJR 11 and it subsequently passed the House and Senate on Tuesday with protections for both ballot initiatives and local control of factory farms.

The language in HJR 11 will be placed on the ballot in 2014 for the voters of Missouri to approve or disapprove. Opponents of HJR 11 are rightly upset that voters are being asked to decide whether the Constitution should be amended for such a trivial reason as a “farmers’ appreciation” declaration or a “feel good” resolution for the agriculture industry. Another concern is that puppy millers and others that exploit animals will use this as an excuse to argue “standing” in court and bring frivolous law suits claiming that they somehow have a right to raise dogs once again in cramped filthy wire cages without veterinary care. It should be emphasized that while HJR 11 grants the right to farm and raise animals, it still allows for the state legislature and for the voting public to decide how such farming and breeding practices are actually conducted. This is similar to the right to bear arms which doesn’t negate the authority of the government to control guns such as concealed carry permits, background checks, bans on assault rifles, etc.

While there are numerous reasons to vote against HJR 11 at the polls, we can at least take comfort in knowing that if the voters do approve HJR 11, we believe it has been sufficiently amended to safeguard our existing laws protecting animals and to ensure the right to conduct future ballot initiatives affecting animal welfare. It also has been amended to protect the right for counties and local municipalities to regulate factory farms. In fact, HJR 11 would enshrine the right of local control into the state constitution. This is significant as corporate agricultural interests every year attempt to pass legislation that will take away local control of factory farms. HJR 11 would not only protect local control but would actually prevent future attempts by the legislature to erode the right to regulate and control factory farms.

Here is the actual language of HJR 11 that was passed by the Legislature after several noteworthy amendments:

That agriculture which provides food, energy, health benefits, and security is the foundation and stabilizing force of Missouri’s economy. To protect this vital sector of Missouri’s economy, the right of farmers and ranchers to engage in farming and ranching practices shall forever be guaranteed in this state, subject to duly authorized powers, if any conferred by Article VI of the Constitution of Missouri.

SB 9, HB 342, HB 564, and HB 927 Animal Trespass

As reported earlier, these bills would have seriously weakened our anti-cruelty laws and made it more difficult to prosecute those who abuse animals. In the final days of the session, we were able to gain several key amendments which eliminated our most important concerns and will protect our anti-cruelty laws although it does weaken the state animal control laws. Those municipalities with animal control ordinances, however, will not be impacted.

Omnibus Agricultural Legislation

There were several large agricultural bills that contained language that would have jeopardized existing ordinances regulating factory farms and would have prevented future regulations of such facilities. These bills would have opened the doors to factory farms and would have led to the establishments of many more such operations here in Missouri. We were able to successfully amend all of these bills the last night of the session to strip them of these harmful provisions.

There were more than 20 bills that would have weakened our anti-cruelty laws or adversely affected the welfare of the animals that we were able to successfully defeat. Among these were;

HB 785 – would have eliminated the disposition hearing process for abused and neglected animals. This would have resulted in abused animals being left in the hands of their abusers. **DEFEATED**

HB 877 – would have allowed individuals to spay and neuter their own pets which would have resulted in unspeakable suffering to the animals. **DEFEATED**

HJR 29 – would have removed the Department of Agriculture from under control of the governor. This is in response to increased enforcement efforts against puppy mills by the Department under Governor Nixon. **DEFEATED**

HJR 27 – would have prohibited local municipalities from employing humane alternatives to deer and other wildlife overpopulation problems. **DEFEATED**

HB 964 – would have prohibited injunctions against slaughterhouses. This was intended to protect facilities wishing to slaughter horses. **DEFEATED**

We thank you again for your support of the Alliance and your individual efforts to contact your legislators. All of our efforts have paid off and we can rest assured that our hard fought gains for animal welfare over the past years remain in place. So much of this adverse legislation was a direct result of our successful efforts in closing down close to 1,000 puppy mills in the last few years. HJR 11 was specifically addressed at our new puppy mill law in hopes to repeal it, or to seriously weaken it. We have prevailed and the animals have won the day!