



MISSOURI ALLIANCE FOR ANIMAL LEGISLATION FALL 2013 NEWSLETTER

BATTLE AGAINST PUPPY MILLS YIELDING RESULTS

Dogs Early Winners as 1,100 Puppy Mills Shut Down



Puppy millers are licking their wounds as over 1,100 commercial dog breeders and brokers in the state of Missouri have shut their doors over the past 4 years. While industry leaders are lamenting that their “business has been decimated,” some long time animal advocates consider the outcome of the fight against puppy mills here in Missouri as one of the greatest accomplishments in the chronicles of animal welfare. The battle is far from over, however, and it is way too early to declare victory as there is still much work to be done and more improvements needed to eliminate or to bring into line all substandard breeders. We should take pause, nevertheless, and reflect on the progress that has been made in just the past few years.

The latest figures from the state reveal that since January 2009, there has been more than a 50% decline in the number of licensed commercial dog breeders and dealers with over 1,100 puppy mills closing down operations here in Missouri. Another encouraging fact is that the average number of dogs housed by the remaining facilities has also declined, meaning less overcrowding and a better chance of the dogs receiving necessary care. Most impressive is the increase in the funding for enforcement of our laws protecting dogs at commercial breeding facilities. This increase in funding has resulted in more than double the number of inspectors and has allowed the state, for the first time, to have 3 veterinarian inspectors along with 2 investigators to focus solely on substandard breeders and unlicensed breeding operations. As a result, the number of inspections of dog breeders performed annually by the Department of Agriculture has more than tripled.

This dramatic decline in Missouri puppy mills is due to the passage of the Canine Cruelty Prevention Act (CCPA) in 2011 as a result of the Prop B campaign. This Act has significantly

improved living conditions for dogs confined by commercial dog breeders. The Act requires that all dogs receive an annual veterinary examination and must receive continued veterinary care throughout the year. In addition, dogs now must have unfettered access to the outdoors, significantly increased living space, and dogs are no longer allowed to be housed on wire flooring. These simple and common sense provisions have driven hundreds of cruel dog breeders out of business as they could no longer easily exploit dogs for a quick profit. Lack of veterinary care was one of the most serious problems encountered in puppy mills as many commercial breeders chose to either treat ailing animals themselves or allow the animals to suffer needlessly knowing it was cheaper to replace the dog than provide the animal with needed veterinary care. It is very telling about the puppy mill industry when a law mandating that dogs be provided with veterinary care causes so many breeders to abandon the business.

Another important provision of the CCPA was that it granted authority to the Attorney General to prosecute substandard kennels. In the past, we had to rely on local prosecutors to enforce our state laws protecting dogs. Unfortunately, these local prosecutors were often reluctant to charge residents of their counties and gross cruelty was often overlooked or perpetrators only given trifling fines. In contrast, Attorney General Chris Koster, as a result of this new authority, established a special unit within his office to prosecute breeders who failed to comply with laws protecting animals. This new unit, the Canine Cruelty Prevention Unit, was placed under the leadership of Assistant Attorney General Jessica Blome, who has successfully prosecuted dozens of substandard dog breeders (see related article). In fact, state officials have given this unit credit for over half of the dog breeding closures in the state. Previously when state inspectors would write-up deficient facilities, the breeders would simply ignore the citations as they knew there would be no consequences for their non-compliance. Now that non-compliance will be prosecuted, hundreds of breeders have chosen to shut down their breeding operations rather than face stiff penalties.

As we savor this victory for the dogs, we must remain vigilant in our fight against puppy mills. During the past two legislative sessions there were several serious attempts to weaken the CCPA as well as attempts to weaken our long standing anti-cruelty statutes in retribution for our successful efforts to rein in puppy mill cruelty. There will surely be future attempts in the Legislature to weaken our laws protecting animals from abuse and neglect. While we prepare for the battles ahead of us, we can surely take comfort in our success. Figures obtained from the Missouri Department of Agriculture as well as industry sources indicate that there are over 50,000 less dogs confined in puppy mills in Missouri today than compared to just four years ago. **This is 50,000 less dogs that are suffering neglect and abuse in a cruel puppy mill.** We can also be thankful that dogs remaining in commercial breeding establishments are now afforded improved standards of care as a result of the CCPA. They also have the added protections and safeguards resulting from an increase in state inspections as well as vital oversight by the Attorney General's office.

While we celebrate these unparalleled accomplishments and are grateful for these achievements, we must aggressively continue our efforts and never give up the fight for animal welfare. Please continue to contact your legislators and state officials to ensure that all animals receive needed protection from abuse and neglect in the state.

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