

Legislation - What's Hot

By Joan Miller, CFA Legislative Information Liaison

If You Breed CATS..... You May Be a “Puppy Mill” !

From Los Angeles to Texas to Minnesota to New York animal activists are pushing legislation to stop “PUPPY MILLS”. Lawmakers and the general public readily support proposals promising to end the misery of animals housed in squalid conditions. Most people have no idea that these “puppy mill” laws impact, not only irresponsible dog breeders, but also moderate sized pedigreed cat breeders and can even mean regulation of breeders with one cat. Several local and state laws are examples of this concept.

New York State already has a “pet dealer” licensing law. Now the state wants to regulate “back yard breeders” of dogs *and cats*. The City of Los Angeles in 2000 passed a “Breeder Permit” law requiring a fee and permission to breed even one litter. You would think nothing more could happen. Because the law is ignored and not enforced and the animal shelter intake numbers have not been reduced, the City Council announced a new “puppy mill crackdown” on June 7th. The Department of Animal Services has been instructed to create an ordinance banning “commercial” breeding of dogs, cats, rabbits and chickens. “Puppy mill” laws are clearly not just for the dogs.

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The definition of “puppy mill” has always been vague and the term is evolving. HSUS has no official definition, however their website states, “Puppy mills house dogs in shockingly poor conditions”. The ASPCA defines a puppy mill as “a *large-scale commercial* dog breeding operation where *profit is given priority* over the well-being of the *dogs*. The ASPCA and HSUS were both behind Texas bill, AB1451, which claims to regulate “commercial” breeders of dogs AND CATS.

For many animal advocates “commercial” means ANY breeding and selling of animals with an assumed desire for profit. The more extreme activists consider any selling of pets, other than those from shelters or rescue groups, to be a commercial business needing regulation and taxation.

Home breeders of cats often believe they will be exempted from these laws because cat breeding is generally not “profit” making and rarely “commercial”. CFA participants who breed fine cats fulfill our mission to “preserve and promote the pedigreed breeds of cats.....” In America making a profit is usually admired.

Whether cat breeders fall within the “large scale” category depends on the proposal.. In Texas, according to AB 1451, if a person possesses 11 intact females over 6 months of age and sells 20 kittens or puppies per year they must be regulated. A cattery with a moderate to large breeding program would fall into this “large-scale” category yet the arbitrary number has no relationship to quality of care. The bill is certain to be copied by other states. Proponents have already stated the number will be lowered.

New York State's "Back Yard Breeder" bill (AB 8146) was introduced in early June 2011. This one will affect every breeder, other than pet dealers (breeders who sell 25 or more cats/dogs per year bred on their premises), who are already regulated. There is no number to trigger regulation. Any cat bred would require an annual fee of \$115 and the same "facility" standards as required for pet dealers. Housing must be in enclosures or cages with impervious surfaces.

The newest "puppy mill" bill version in Minnesota (S 462/H 702) did not have a committee hearing and the session ended in May. Since 2005 this state has tried to pass a bill to regulate "commercial breeders", defined as a person who breeds and/or sells cat or dogs, and who "possesses ten or more adult intact animals (24 weeks old) and whose animals produce more than five litters of puppies or kittens per year".

All 50 states have animal cruelty laws and, except for a very few, violations are a felony crime. The reasons for "puppy mill" proposals are to allow unannounced inspections of breeders' homes, to charge high fees for revenue and to discourage any purposeful breeding of cats and dogs while homeless animals die in shelters. There is the expectation that with fewer breeders pet buyers will go to shelters. Ironically 3 to 4 million dogs and cats are killed in shelters each year for a variety of reasons. Yet, per HSUS, we need 18 million new pets each year to replace the old cats and dogs who die. With shelter management reforms, health improvements and aggressive marketing cats and dogs suitable as pets should all find a home. Pedigreed cats with predictable characteristics are ideal pets for many people and needed. "Puppy mill" legislation does impact cat breeding and is not in the public's best interest. It is critical for CFA breeders to not get discouraged, to continue to produce fine quality pet cats in excellent cattery environments and to fight these laws.