



Testimony of Julian Prager
PA Federation of Dog Clubs, Legislative Chair
On House Bill 1463 (Pashinski) – Dog License Fees
Wednesday, September 27, 2017

In addition to the affiliations provided to you, I am a former Acting Director of one of the largest municipal shelter systems in the U.S. and the subject matter expert for dogs in the Animal and Plant Inspection service in USDA responsible for the enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act. I also serve as the legislative director for the National Animal Interest Alliance, a group dedicated to preserving the human-animal bond, and as a Delegate to the American Kennel Club.

The PFDC supports the goals of HB 1463 to ensure that the Dog Law functions are adequately funded and protected from encroachment. However, we believe that some changes would make the bill even more equitable and remove current distinctions that have no enforcement impact.

I was pleased to work closely with the Department and members of this body in 2008 to ensure the passage of changes to the Dog Law. At that time, PFDC urged the inclusion of increased fees for both individual and kennel licenses. For reasons of which I am sure we are all aware, those provisions were not in the final bill sent to the Governor for signature.

The fee increase for agents is overdue as is a centralized information system to assist in increasing licensing and enhance enforcement of the Dog Law. With the advances in computers, selling licenses online is more cost effective, more efficient, and makes the process easier, encouraging people to comply with the law. Department staff must be able to retrieve dog license information to enforce the dog law expeditiously and fairly and to fund improvements in its operations by increasing the percentage of dogs licensed in the Commonwealth.

While we agree that license fees should be increased, we are concerned about the way they are being increased. Dog Law serves many purposes and its expenses are derived from these functions. We are concerned that license fees for individual dog owners appear to be disproportionately used to fund kennel license oversight. We want the Dog Law to be self-sufficient to the extent possible within each operational area. By focusing solely on individual license fees, we are concerned that the costs of kennel license inspections and related operations are not being funded by licensed kennels, but by the public. License fees for kennels provide a disincentive to individually license dogs for those who accept periodic inspections since it is significantly less expensive to hold a kennel license than to license the individual dogs. In 2008, we proposed several alternatives for increasing kennel and individual license fees and would be pleased to discuss the specifics further at an appropriate time and setting.

After a determination is made concerning the costs of activities associated with licensing of individual dogs and their activities, the fee level should be established accordingly for both kennels license and individual licenses. The Department should have the flexibility going forward to establish reasonable and necessary fees to cover its requirements. We supported provisions enabling fee changes through Department regulation in 2008 and continue to do so.

We continue to oppose the differentiation in license fees between neutered or spayed and intact dogs. There is no difference in the enforcement burden related to whether a dog is capable of breeding and believe that the policy origin for the distinction is no longer valid. This is implicitly recognized in the Dog Law by requiring licensing of rescue groups that import animals into the Commonwealth. A major source of crowding in our shelters results from the import of animals from other jurisdictions, not the irresponsible breeding of purebred dogs. The best science-based study of shelter data nationwide found that only 5% of shelter animals are purebreds. It is bringing neutered shelter animals into the Commonwealth that is now our problem and differential fees do not address that. We do not require the reporting of sources and outcomes for shelters and rescues that some other states do, like Colorado and Florida. Without that data, we cannot share programs that work, drop those that do not and improve shelter outcomes. Such data would help us better understand the impact on the Commonwealth of dogs imported by rescues and shelters, many of which are transported in violation of the Animal Welfare Act, thus endangering the welfare of those animals.

Each puppy born should be licensed at the required age. Failure to register is an enforcement issue, the breeding of the dog is not and should not be penalized by increased fees through state regulation. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that dogs with intact reproductive systems live longer than those that have them removed and that the health benefits from having a dog intact outweigh those associated with neutering and spaying dogs.

We support the change to Section 905 safeguarding funds deposited into the Dog Law Restricted account resulting from actions of the judicial system, as we did in earlier attempt to amend the statute. However, considering the history of this issue, we ask that you expand this protection to all funds received in the account to ensure that the non-tax funds obtained to enforce the Dog Law are reserved for that purpose.

We hope you will consider our recommendations in moving your proposal to the full House so that Dog Law will have a firm foundation moving forward to improve the care of all dogs in the Commonwealth. Thank you for having me here.