

Good morning Chairman Causer and members of the committee and thank you for allowing me to speak today on HB1463, a very important piece of legislation.

As someone who has worked in two of the largest shelters in Pennsylvania, both who held stray dogs for our Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement's state dog warden when needed -- I have seen firsthand the very difficult work required of our dog warden as well as the very important tasks they perform. The Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement (BDLE) is responsible for kennel inspections across the commonwealth, protecting the public from dangerous dogs, promoting the well-being of our dogs and ensures that all dogs are protected from rabies--a disease that is 99.9% fatal to humans. The BDLE employs dog wardens in counties across Pennsylvania who do these inspections and who also inspect dogs who are part of our state's dangerous dog registry. The bureau provides a very important service to Pennsylvanians (a duty only dog wardens are authorized to enforce) and is funded primarily by revenue generated from dog license sales. In 2009 the department was running in the black and was able to provide grant money to shelters in many parts of Pennsylvania where resources were and still are lacking. Many shelters depended on this grant money in order to stay up and running. In that same year \$4 million dollars was taken from the Dog Law Restricted Account in order to balance the state's budget. This bankrupted the department and it has never recovered from the loss of funds and was never reimbursed as promised. Shelters unfortunately had to cut staff and a lot of the smaller shelters around our state had to shut down which placed a greater burden on not only the shelters who were able to survive but also on our state dog warden's and the BDLE. This legislation if passed will enable the bureau to undergo a much-needed modernization improving the way licenses are sold as well as ensuring the solvency of the dog law restricted account. Dog license fees have not increased in over 20 years, since 1996. The statutory requirements of the Bureau have evolved greatly since 1996, specially the changes in 2008 regarding commercial kennel operations. While the workload has increased, the revenue stream for dog licenses (85% of the total revenue) has stayed the same. Without a modest increase in the cost of dog licenses the bureau will no longer be able to safeguard the dogs of Pennsylvania nor its citizens. For the sake of comparison, our neighbors in Ohio's dog licenses begin at \$20 and increase based on altered or not etc.

As I stated earlier, I am a fiscal conservative, generally I oppose any increase in taxes or fees; however it needs to be stated that unlike other fees or licenses, a dog license is required to be purchased only by those who own dogs--essentially it is a "user fee" you don't own a dog you don't pay--but what makes it different is that it benefits ALL Pennsylvanians.

I respectfully ask the committee to vote HB1463 out for a full vote in the House.

Thank you.

Mary Kennedy Withrow, Member
Dog Law Advisory Board