

The Honorable Senators _____
The U.S. Senate, U.S. Capitol Building; Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Representative _____
U.S. House of Representatives; Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators _____

and Representative _____,

I am a constituent who follows animal protection legislation and wishes to know the status of the Pet Animal Welfare Statute of 2005 (S. 1139/H.R. 2669). The PAWS bill amends the Animal Welfare Act to fortify the Secretary of Agriculture's capacity to oversee the commercial breeding industry. I understand the bill, introduced by Sens. Rick Santorum (R-PA) and Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Reps. Jim Gerlach (R-PA) and Sam Farr (D-CA), was referred to House and Senate Agriculture committees.

Present law categorizes high volume breeders who sell directly to the public as "retail pet stores," and exempts them from Animal Welfare Act guidelines for licensing and animal care. Thus, a breeder who sells animals via the internet or newspaper ads functions with minimal oversight. Kittens, puppies and other companion animals easily cross state borders with no information about the decrepit surroundings in which they were raised. This loophole undermines a key intent of the AWA and deceives consumers, who are conned into spending huge fees on animals with health complications.

PAWS requires breeders to obtain a USDA license if they sell directly to the public and annually raise six or more litters that generate over 25 puppies or kittens. In addition, PAWS grants public access to source records for imported animals bred overseas, lengthens the 21-day suspension of facilities with AWA violations to 60 days, and empowers the USDA to apply for injunctions.

A recent survey suggests 406,000 American households bought a dog over the internet. This figure doesn't account for innumerable people who purchase via newspaper ads and pet stores. Most would be shocked to learn their beloved companion began life in a breeding mill.

Puppy mills are profit-driven enterprises that typically fail to provide adequate veterinary care, diet, exercise or shelter. Large sites house up to 1,000 dogs in rusted chicken wire cages heaped three or four tiers high. Urine and feces seep into lower cages. Dogs at the top swelter in the summer and freeze in the winter. Smaller facilities may board 50 or more dogs in squalid kennel runs.

There are approximately 5,000 mill-style outfits nationwide. Cruelty investigators have uncovered parasite-infested dogs with oozing eyes, ear infections, and fur so matted it forms a cocoon over sores. Mange can transform a puppy's skin into a blanket of red scabs. Dogs in congested quarters easily spread worms, coccidia, giardia, and deadly parvovirus and distemper.

Puppy mills function primarily in Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania. Missouri leads the way, with an estimated \$40 million per year in puppy mill profits.

The PAWS bill is a mandatory first step toward regulating mass breeders. PAWS also focuses on the burdensome policies and sparse resources that result in lax enforcement of the AWA. I sincerely hope this vital legislation does not get "stuck" in committee and would like to know if you already do, or intend to, cosponsor the PAWS bill.

Thank you,