

Editorial: End puppy mills, The Columbus Dispatch

Lawmakers shouldn't let session end without action on dog-breeders
Monday, October 13, 2008 2:51 AM

Ohio lawmakers should not allow this General Assembly to conclude without passing a law to crack down on the state's shameful puppy-mill industry.

Ohio has among the nation's weakest dog-breeding laws and annually ranks among states with the highest number of dogs produced in the wretched conditions common to assembly-line breeding operations.

Dogs often are made to produce litter after litter without regard to their health. Many are bred to exhaustion in cramped cages with poor food, little socialization with humans or other dogs, inadequate shelter from the elements and virtually no veterinary care.

The pups they produce often are sick and have behavioral problems, but that's of little concern to the breeders after the unhealthy dogs have been sold to pet stores and Internet buyers with minimal record-keeping.

This could end with reasonable regulations, applied to those who keep kennels housing more than a specified number of dogs.

Bills to clamp down on cruelty with minimum standards for living space, food, water, daylight, time out of cages and medical care have been introduced in the past two legislatures but have gone nowhere.

The current versions, House Bill 223 and Senate Bill 173, deserve legislators' attention before they expire along with the 127th General Assembly.

In the Senate, the measure is sponsored by West Chester Republican Gary Cates. The House bill is sponsored by Rep. Jim Hughes, R-Clintonville and Rep. Robert F. Hagan, D-Youngstown.

The legislation would create a division in the Ohio Department of Agriculture to set and enforce those minimum humane standards, which would apply to kennels where nine or more dogs are bred per year.

To make sellers of dogs more accountable, those who buy and sell dogs at auctions to sell to pet stores would have to be licensed and maintain records of their transactions. Once the dogs reach pet stores, none could legally be sold without either a veterinarian's certification of health or a 21-day money-back guarantee for any dog deemed by a buyer's veterinarian to be diseased or injured.

Driving puppy mills out of business would be no loss to Ohioans who love dogs. County animal shelters and reputable animal-welfare groups have plenty of healthy, well-raised puppies and dogs available for adoption. With stronger state regulations, people who want a purebred dog could get one, with assurances that it was bred in humane and healthy circumstances by a reputable licensed breeder.

Aversion to excessive government regulation is no reason to oppose rules ensuring humane treatment of animals, not to mention fairness for the dog-buying public. True puppy mills -- those that subject animals to cruel and unhealthy overbreeding in the pursuit of profit -- aren't the sort of businesses Ohio needs.