Cracking Down on Puppy Mills

There are 3 Bills to Help Protect Dogs – and the Public – from Puppy Mills:

- PetFax Act (Honesty in Pet Sales) – H.R. 5715
- WOOF Act – H.R. 1002
- Puppy Protection Act – H.R. 2442

What is a Puppy Mill, and Why is This a Problem?

Current standards for the care of mother dogs kept in mills are barely adequate for survival, loopholes allow violators to continue renewing their license, and current laws fail to adequately address the fraud and deception of puppy mills.

Puppy Mills are Cruel – It’s No Way to Treat a Dog

Puppy mills are large, commercial dog breeding operations that produce puppies to sell in pet stores and on the internet. Over 100,000 mother dogs suffer in puppy mills where they are bred repeatedly and forced to spend their entire lives in barren cages without ever touching a blade of grass. Horrific, painful injuries are commonplace and frequently go untreated. When the mothers are no longer able to reproduce, they are killed. Puppies often become sick due to the poor breeding, unsanitary conditions of mills, and long-distance transport to pet stores where they are sold to unsuspecting customers. Current laws and regulations are so weak, they are survival standards at best.

Puppy Mills Spread Disease & Consumers are Deceived

Puppy mills aren’t just cruel – they also pose a public health risk and consumer protection issue. Families are devastated after their new puppy dies of illness, and in several cases, the sick puppies have passed dangerous diseases onto people, such as campylobacter, a bacterial infection. The CDC undertook a major investigation in 2019 tying campylobacter to puppies sold from pet stores. Pet stores have a track record of deceiving consumers about the source of a puppy - they deny that their puppies come from mills and don’t disclose health problems. Over 300 localities across the nation have adopted legislation restricting the sale of puppies in pet stores, and numerous state legislatures are taking up the issue.

Petfax Act (H.R. 5715)

Recently introduced by U.S. Reps. Charlie Crist (D-FL) and Guy Reschenthaler (R-PA), the bipartisan PetFax Act would mandate honesty and truthfulness in the sales of dogs and cats. If you purchase a car, you can get the car’s full history from a CarFax report, but when it comes to purchasing a dog or cat, the public is kept in the dark about the animal’s history and where it was bred. The bill addresses several key problems with puppy mills and pet stores:

- It requires that sellers of dogs and cats disclose certain information to a customer about the animals, including information identifying the dealer who bred the animals, the number of dogs bred and sold
by that dealer over the past two years, a listing of any violations the dealer has had in the past two years, and health information about the animals, including whether a veterinarian was seen, vaccinations administered, and congenital disease. Shelters and rescues are exempt.

- The bill makes it illegal to misrepresent the source of a dog or cat, including misrepresenting whether the animal came from a high-volume breeder.
- It requires that animal welfare inspection records, including breeder inspection reports, are reinstated on the USDA website, as they were prior to being taken down in 2017.
- Similar to the WOOF Act, which has over 200 cosponsors, it prohibits USDA from issuing or renewing a license to a dealer who has had a suspension within the past 10 years. It also prevents a license from being granted to the immediate family member of a dealer who has had their license suspended or revoked, to someone who resides at the same address, or to an entity where the dealer holds an ownership interest.

WOOF Act (H.R. 1002)

The Welfare of Our Friends (WOOF) Act would close a gaping loophole that currently allows puppy mills with violations to continue operating. The bill would prohibit the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) from licensing a dog dealer whose previous licenses have been suspended or revoked in the last 10 years. Further, it would prevent USDA from issuing or renewing a license to a dog dealer's immediate family members, a person who resides at the dog dealer's address, or legal entities where the dealer holds an ownership interest. The bill is led by U.S Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Charlie Crist (D-FL), Glenn Thompson (R-PA), and Jim McGovern (D-MA) and has over 200 cosponsors.

Puppy Protection Act (H.R. 2442)

The Puppy Protection Act would significantly elevate the USDA standards for breeders that govern the humane handling, care, treatment, and transportation of dogs. Current standards are severely anemic and barely enough to ensure survival. The bill calls for basic improvements, such as increased space, access to the outdoors, socialization, and limits on the number of times a mother dog can be bred. Some of the requirements include:

- Enclosures with solid flooring, with detailed space requirements, including enough space to allow the tallest dog to stand on his or her hind legs without touching the roof.
- Feeding dogs at least twice per day, and temperatures maintained between 45-85 degrees.
- Unrestricted access to outdoor exercise areas during daylight hours for dogs over 12 weeks.
- Meaningful socialization with humans and compatible dogs each day for at least 30 minutes.
- Veterinary care, including a thorough, hands-on exam each year and screening for inheritable diseases.
- Restricting breeding to 2 litters in any 18 month period or 6 litters in a dog's lifetime.
- A requirement to find humane placement for retired breeding dogs.

The bill is led by U.S. Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Charlie Crist (D-FL), Guy Reschenthaler (R-PA), and Jim McGovern (D-MA).