

Law could improve health standards, limit dogs at facilities

SPRINGFIELD – Come this spring, the state of Illinois might be home to new breeding and health standards for its furry friends.

State Rep. John Fritchey, D-Chicago, recently proposed legislation that is aimed toward cracking down on puppy mills. Named “Chloe’s bill” after a young downstate pup who survived mistreatment, the proposal would limit breeders to possessing 20 unaltered dogs and stop felony animal-cruelty offenders from obtaining dog-breeding licenses.

“As a dog owner, I fully appreciate that pets aren’t just like family, they really become a part of the family,” Fritchey said.

“Illinois right now is essentially devoid of any meaningful regulation of puppy mills.”

The legislation – House Bill 198 – would close loopholes to increase the health and reporting standards in breeding facilities.

If passed without amendments, the proposal would require dogs to be kept in shelters with proper heating, cooling and ventilation, and without wire flooring. Pet stores and breeders also must provide buyers with a dog’s full medical history, as well as clearly display extensive information – from the dates of medical treatments and procedures, to breeder contact information and the pet’s retail price.

“It’s important for the public to understand that this legislation is as much about consumer protection as it is about animal welfare,” Fritchey said.

Law violators could be fined, their operations halted or driver’s licenses revoked. And animals could, of course, be seized.

“I heard stories of just horrible treatment at these puppy mills, and we have to make sure that we are not allowing animals to be abused,” said state Rep. Jack Franks, D-Marengo, a co-sponsor of the bill. “Our society values dogs very highly, and they certainly deserve extra protection.”

According to The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, there are more than 5,000 licensed dog-breeding facilities in the country. But that doesn’t account for several others who might be operating against the law.

“Really, I think what would change this industry the most is for people to stop buying puppies in pet stores,” said Cori Menkin, ASPCA senior director of legislative initiatives. “If there is no demand, ... the puppy mills will stop turning them out.”

Pennsylvania is the only state with a law as comprehensive as the Illinois proposal, Fritchey said. Although the lawmaker expects some opposition to the legislation, he said he planned to fight until it becomes law.

“Every breeder who raises their dogs in humane conditions will welcome this law,” Fritchey said. “Those breeders who treat puppies as cash crops are going to be in for a rude awakening.”

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