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2007 MAR 30 PM 3:04

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY  
REVIEW COMMISSION

March 12, 2007

RE: Comments on proposed changes to PA dog laws

First let me express my appreciation for the work of the Advisory Board in drawing up these provisions. Those of us involved in animal rescue have been asking for a long time for rules that would aim to ensure safe and healthy living conditions for all dogs in kennel situations, especially commercial breeding facilities. We applaud this initiative.

While the intent and overall goal of the proposed rules is excellent, there are some provisions that in my view are unnecessarily burdensome to shelter operators without substantially affecting the welfare of the dogs:

1. A distinction should be made in the kennel license requirements between commercial breeding facilities and small rescue groups that use foster homes (temporary homes). The proposed license provision states that "...each temporary home shall be treated a separate kennel location." Many municipalities have ordinances prohibiting kennels, so redefining temporary homes as kennels would make them illegal according to some local laws. This would be crippling to breed-specific rescue groups, which rely almost exclusively on foster homes spread across the state or region. Groups such as the one I am affiliated with, that rescue any/all breeds of dogs, rely on foster homes to care for dogs that are too young, too old, or too much in need of training to be housed in the boarding kennel where we keep our adult dogs (and where our group maintains a separate kennel license). Temporary homes generally have no more than one rescue dog at a time, and that dog is housed and treated like a family pet, getting more individual attention and training than would be possible in a kennel situation. Countless dogs are saved and become wonderful pets in temporary homes; they are not abused or neglected, and they are not exploited for profit. Placing temporary homes associated with legitimate rescue groups in the same category as commercial breeders would force many of them out of existence, and that would be a grave disservice to the groups and the dogs they rescue.
2. Regarding the requirement that dogs entering a kennel facility be quarantined prior to joining the kennel population for 14 days or until vaccinations can be given and become effective, a definition of "quarantine" should be provided,

that takes into account that most kennels do not have a completely separate facility that would meet the same standard of quarantine for infectious diseases as a veterinary hospital; and that the population already in the kennel has been immunized against diseases for which vaccines are available.

3. Exercise: Taking a dog for a walk on leash or a romp in the exercise yard is both mandatory in the recommendations and healthy for the dog, even in the rain or snow; but the proposed rule requires that exercise areas must "...protect the dogs from becoming wet, matted, or muddy during the exercise." That is just silly.
4. Records: The recommendations specify that written documentation be kept in excruciating detail, including each dog's age, weight, description, and microchip number, of every daily exercise, kennel cleaning, bowl washing, and water changing. Such bookkeeping requirements do nothing to insure that those tasks are carried out properly; they just impose an added chore on kennel workers and volunteers who care for shelter dogs. Random unannounced inspections of actual kennel cleanliness would be useful in ensuring that the sites are properly maintained. Volunteer logs noting which dogs received what exercise are useful for ensuring that no dogs miss out on their exercise. But keeping records as detailed as recommended is both unproductive and unnecessary.
5. Kennel specifications: Most of the provisions recommended, such as storage conditions of food and supplies, temperature control, and ventilation are reasonable and desirable. However, specifications for such details as the slope of the floors and the size and placement of the drains cannot easily be applied to existing facilities; nor should one specification necessarily apply to every size kennel: a section of 5 runs does not require as large a drain as a section of 20 runs. These are good guidelines for future construction, but to mandate them as regulations for existing facilities is impractical.

I request that you take these comments into account when considering the recommended revisions to the dogs laws, and that you share all comments received with the Dog Law Advisory Board.



Ruth Roberts  
Pet Friends, Inc.