

Law is Protecting, not Stopping Puppy Mills



Puppy mills are places of shocking neglect and inhumanity where dogs are horribly mistreated, run by unethical breeders who seek to churn out the maximum number of puppies possible. That's why, in 2021, the Illinois legislature passed a bill ostensibly designed to protect animals from the cruelty of puppy mills.

Unfortunately, the bill had the opposite effect.

Instead of shutting down puppy mills or stopping the flow of mill dogs into Illinois, the law was written in such a flawed way that it harmed responsible breeders and kept the puppy mill industry afloat, ultimately targeting allies in the fight against mills.

First, the bill set up a false choice: shelter dogs or purebred dogs. While we can acknowledge that shelters play a vitally important role in matching animals with loving families, that shouldn't mean someone who loves Golden Retrievers or Yorkies or Australian Shepherds shouldn't be able to get one from an ethical source. But the authors of the 2021 bill required that pets be obtained only from shelters, never from breeders or small businesses that help breeders place puppies in good homes.

Yet puppies must come from somewhere, especially during the great American dog shortage -- and that's why the bill did not actually shut down puppy mills but merely diverted some of their traffic to shelters. The phenomenon, known as "retail rescue," refers to the cycle of shelters paying puppy mills to "rescue" their dogs, then adopting out the dogs for a fee -- thereby pumping more cash into the mill industry shelters claim to oppose. It's a symbiotic relationship that keeps puppy mills thriving.

That's why Illinois law desperately needs a tuneup. The proposed HB2793 would choke off demand for mill dogs at the source by prohibiting all entities -- small businesses and shelters -- from obtaining puppies from a mill. It would establish strict breeder standards of care that require humane, loving treatment in the form of regular veterinary attention and oversight, socialization and exercise, as well as rigid requirements for the way animals are housed and the amount of space they must have. These are the kind of standards that responsible breeders already have in place and will ensure unethical breeders can't stay in business -- which should be the goal we all share.

Instead, a confusing campaign of disinformation is distorting factual information about HB2793, because the shelters who oppose it know that emotional propaganda can be an effective tool when it comes to society's collective adoration of pets. Those who oppose it are telling the public that the bill will worsen care for puppies in Illinois. But the text of the bill is easy to read online and tells the truth in plain language.

This bill should not be controversial -- and it would not be, were the facts fully understood and were the success of those with the biggest platforms not so tied to its failure. Instead, the bill should be recognized as the win it is for all of us who cherish animals and believe they must have a legal right to be treated with compassion and high-quality care. Without HB2793, the status quo -- in which unethical operations are allowed to thrive while the ethical ones are shut down -- will remain the law of the land.

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