

**Comments Submitted for House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee
Hearing on HB 1463
September 27, 2017
Anne Irwin, Member Dog Law Advisory Board**

Representative Causer and members of the Agriculture Committee, I am Anne Irwin. I retired as Executive Director of the Bucks County SPCA in 2015 after 43 years and I retired from the board of the Federated Humane Societies of PA this May after serving as Legislative Chair for 28 years. My mother was Legislative Chair before me and I remember working with her and others to support the passage of the Dog Law of 1982. I continue to serve as a member of the Dog Law Advisory Board. I am writing these comments in support of HB 1463 as a private citizen because I hope my perspective might be useful.

I started regularly attending and participating at Dog Law Advisory Board meetings in the mid 70s. Meeting members of the various stakeholder groups: farm organizations, kennel owners, humane societies, sportsmen and dog clubs opened my eyes to the different ways that the Bureau of Dog Law impacted each of us, and showed me that its successful operation was important to all of us. Humane societies and Dog Law have always worked closely together because humane societies have provided the housing for stray dogs that police and Dog Wardens pick up. Humane Officers and Dog Wardens often work together or share information on cases that involve violations of Dog Law and cruelty law. All of the same stakeholder groups that had an interest in the success of Dog Law 40 years ago still have that interest. The general public Pennsylvania has shown overwhelmingly, in their support Dog Law revisions in 2008 and for changes to the cruelty law more recently, that they care about the welfare of dogs.

Most people don't know about the Dog Law Restricted Account and if they think about it at all they think that the activities of Dog Law are supported by their tax dollars. They assume that their tax dollars assure that someone will come if they have found a stray dog, or to investigate an attack on a person or an animal by a dog. They assume that their tax dollars pay for inspection of kennels to assure the wellbeing of dogs. They are surprised when they learn that all of these activities and more are funded by the purchase of their dog license, and I am confident that most would be willing to pay an increased price to assure that these services continue.

When I first started paying attention to Dog Law, Dog Wardens were poorly equipped and not trained at all. Kennel inspections were haphazard and uneven to say the least. Relations between the Bureau of Dog Law and humane societies were poor. There was room for improvement in every way. That has changed. Dog wardens are now well trained professionals who are valued in the communities they serve. They work with humane societies, local police departments and municipal officials on a variety of issues concerning dogs. Kennel inspections are more frequent and thorough than ever before. When a Dog Warden position is vacant the absence is felt. For the most part they have the equipment they need, but they seem to be perpetually challenged by an aging fleet of vehicles. Leadership has done a good job of making their money go a long way, but it is time for a fee increase.

The changes to the Dog Law in 1996 included a fee increase for both individual and lifetime dog

licenses. They also added responsibilities like enforcing the laws about rabies vaccination, and the new provisions on dangerous dogs. The lifetime license has become increasingly popular and which reduces the predictable income from annual license sales. The price of the lifetime license relative to the annual license needs to be adjusted.

The changes to the law in 2008, which were strongly supported by dog lovers across the state added responsibilities and expenses without adding an individual license fee increase. The statewide system for license sales proposed in HB 1463 should result in increased license sales, but that system will cost money to implement. The proposed license fees are reasonable and still far below those in many localities. The price of a license is just a tiny fraction of what people are willing to spend for their dogs. Please act so that the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement can maintain and continue to improve the level of service that they are providing for the dogs and people of Pennsylvania. Thank you for taking my views into consideration.

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