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OF THE UNITED STATES**

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September 27, 2017

Dear Legislator,

The purpose of this letter is to urge you to support HB 1463, a plan to protect dogs and modernize dog licensing in Pennsylvania. This legislation proposes a streamlined process for online dog license purchases and a modest increase in fees to provide the financial resources necessary for continuation of the critical services delivered by the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement. The Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement, comprised of 65 staff members, is charged with a substantial volume of work. The small agency is responsible for inspecting all state licensed kennels twice annually and investigating those operating without a license, investigating dog bites and maintaining a dangerous dog registry, picking up and transporting stray dogs to a shelter, reimbursing shelters for housing stray dogs, investigating dog related complaints, and ensuring all dogs over three months of age have a current license and rabies vaccination.

The Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement is the only entity in PA authorized to enter the premises of a licensed kennel without a search warrant. For this reason, all dog wardens have received Humane Society Police Officer Training. Although dog wardens cannot enforce animal cruelty laws, they often act as the eyes for humane agents in kennels by making cruelty referrals when appropriate. This has resulted in cruelty convictions, dogs being removed from kennels and placed into forever homes, and puppy mills being shut down. Without a reasonable fee increase, the well-being of thousands of dogs housed in PA kennels is at risk.

The Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement keeps track of dangerous dogs in Pennsylvania. Without this program, dangerous dog owners would have no accountability to register their dogs. This is particularly concerning as a public safety hazard. According to State Farm Insurance, PA ranked 4th in the nation for dog bite insurance claims filed by homeowners.

The Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement also collects stray dogs. While the police can pick up stray dogs, they are otherwise busy and not as equipped for this function as are dog wardens. While dog wardens have a statutory obligation to pick up stray dogs and transport them to shelters, the shelters are not required to accept them. The Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement currently reimburses shelters for holding stray dogs, a reimbursement that cannot be sustained without the passing of this bill. Then where will our stray dogs go? Passage of HB 1463 would enable the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement to reinstate a much-needed grant program for shelters known as "Keep the Lights On."

Lastly, this bill will allow for a statewide online dog license sales portal that will be more cost-effective and consistent than the current fragmented systems, virtual and paper, utilized by differing counties. The online process will be easier and more convenient for citizens, thereby generating more revenue through augmented compliance.

As the Pennsylvania State Director for the Humane Society of the United States, I have witnessed the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement continue to operate in the face of a funding crisis. Without this dog license increase, the agency will not have the fiscal viability to sustain this work, threatening to undo improvements made over the past nine years, and putting dogs and puppies at greater risk of mistreatment. I strongly urge you to support this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kristen Tullo".

Kristen Tullo
Pennsylvania State Director
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