

**House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee Hearing: HB 2525**

**June 12, 2008**

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Good morning, Chairman Hanna, Chairman Hershey and Honorable members of the committee. I would first like to thank you all for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you on a topic that I feel is of utmost importance.

My name is Bryan Langlois and I am a licensed veterinarian in the state of Pennsylvania. I have been such since my graduation from Veterinary School in 2005. My interest in veterinary medicine over the last 15 years has been in the area of Animal Shelter Medicine and Kennel operations. As such, I have immersed myself in this area of study intensely over that time by volunteering, working, and visiting many shelters along the East Coast of the United States as well as Canada. This culminated in my current position as Vice President and Medical Director of the Humane League of Lancaster County (my place of employment as a shelter veterinarian from the time of my graduation). I am also employed on a per diem basis at two private practice facilities.

The Humane League is a non-profit kennel entity that faces many of the same daily challenges that private and commercial breeders do. We are all faced with the task of ensuring the healthiest product available to the public, be that via sale or adoption. In addition, I have seen some of these kennel environments in Lancaster County first hand during inspections and warrant executions. I have also been responsible for the after care of those animals taken and/or signed over to the Humane League at the request of the kennel owner or a court of law. The conditions of these kennels and dogs I have observed gives me the necessary background to honestly and completely comment on the legislation posed in HB 2525. It is with this background that I am happy to support a majority of the initiatives and regulations proposed in this bill.

In the Veterinary Profession there is a saying that "cats are not small dogs" This is meant to remind the veterinarian that cats have anatomical and physiological differences that make their treatment a unique challenge. I have extrapolated that saying to state "dogs are not small cows". They cannot be subjected to the same husbandry practices. The fundamentals set forth in this bill address this issue properly, providing the dogs with a good quality of life. While I have reviewed HB 2525 in its entirety, and have comments on all sections, time constraints will limit my testimony to those areas regarding the health and well being of the animals.

The identification regulations placed forth in the bill are an important first step for proper health programs to be maintained. All animals in a kennel need to be able to be identified quickly and reliably. The tag system and information present on the front of the cage allows the dogs to be immediately identified for treatment, purchase, or regulatory purposes. The concern of these documents being destroyed by the animals in the cages or by the daily cleaning process can easily be alleviated by placing these records in a water-tight plastic sleeve. Veterinarians are required to have a record of every animal they treat. By implementing the record keeping system described in this bill dog wardens, humane officers, and veterinarians will be able to quickly identify the animals to help ensure proper care of that animal. I feel that in addition to the last date of the veterinary visit, a copy of the physical exam findings of that animal should be present

on the cage as well. This can be easily photocopied or produced in triplicate, so a record may also be kept in a safe, centralized place with-in the kennel.

The air flow and temperature requirements set forth in HB 2525 are vital to ensuring the health of the entire population. Without proper air exchanges, many pathogens, including viruses, bacteria, and molds can accumulate in the kennel and cause infection. In addition, improper ventilation can lead to the build up of ammonia secondary to the break down of urine. This ammonia is a severe respiratory irritant, subsequently leading to more susceptibility of the dog to respiratory infections such as kennel cough and pneumonia. By maintaining a steady temperature in the kennel, stress on the dogs is reduced. This reduced stress ensures a healthier immune system, and as such a healthier dog that can produce and raise healthier puppies for sale. Temperature and air flow regulation cannot be accomplished just by adding a heater and air conditioner. It needs to be done by an air exchange system of some kind that actually continuously substitutes clean outside air for the air in the kennel, and not just recirculate it as an air conditioner or heater will do. Recirculation does not remove virus and bacteria particles; it merely stirs them up, making it more likely for dogs to become infected.

Perhaps one of the greatest areas that need improvement in these kennel situations and that is addressed in HB 2525 is the flooring and space requirements. Coated wire flooring (no matter what the gauge of wire) does not provide a natural footing surface for dogs. I have personally seen many instances of foot related injury secondary to the wire flooring. These injuries range from fractures and lacerations secondary to legs falling through the wire, to toe-nail avulsions, to cases of foot pad inflammation/infection, and finally severe limb abnormalities in dogs from having to learn to walk on such material. Coated wire is not considered a normal type of flooring material in any other kennel situation. It lacks the long term structural support and durability that solid flooring provides. No matter how new or how tight the flooring is pulled, there will always be a portion of "give" to the wire flooring, as that is the nature of the wire. In the most severe cases I have seen, the wire has begun to sag and cause a "bounce" effect when walked over. It cannot be maintained in a suitable fashion to provide the proper footing on which for dogs to walk. While I do applaud the intents of the bill to require solid flooring for the adult dogs, I also feel the bill should go farther and require a majority of the primary enclosure for puppies up to 12 weeks of age to be solid flooring as well. This is the time in a puppy's development when they are learning to walk and strengthen their bones and joints. Too often these wire floors result in either overt injury to the puppy secondary to them being on improperly gauged wire or developmental deformities to their legs and wrists because of the wire. Solid flooring is required, in my opinion, to provide the proper foundation for these dogs to grow and develop on.

Increasing the space requirements for the dogs, and including outdoor exercise areas for them as well, is vital to maintaining a dogs mental well being and happiness in a kennel environment. While I do agree that dogs are pack animals and usually will enjoy the company of others, in the current kennel environment dogs are more forced to be housed in large numbers together in small space. This does not allow for expression of normal behaviours and can lead to guarding of food and water supplies by one or two dogs, creating a situation where dogs can be undernourished and become dehydrated, as well as add unnecessary stress to the dogs. By providing more space for the dogs in a

primary enclosure, the risks of confrontation and fighting is diminished. Personally, I feel the bill should go further in two aspects on this subject. The first is requiring doubling the space requirements for all dogs, not just the first two. The second, and perhaps more important one in my opinion, is to further reduce the number of dogs allowed per enclosure. By reducing this number you can reduce the stress on the dogs, and thus reduce the risk of infection and disease transmission. Exercise areas for all dogs are vital to their well being and health.

The goals set forth in HB 2525 provide what I consider to be the proper exercise areas and requirements for the dogs in a kennel situation. By allowing the dogs a place to freely exercise and interact in a more natural environment, one ensures the healthiest possible animal, and provides for the freedom to express normal behaviour as well as the freedom from fear and distress. The animals that I have seen from these kennels that have lived their entire lives in cages with no access to proper exercise areas demonstrate severe behavioural abnormalities as well as severe social interaction problems, both of which make it very hard for these animals to adjust to a home environment if sold or adopted to the public. Another benefit of exercise areas is that it allows an area to easily move the dogs to when the primary enclosures are cleaned (another very important inclusion to HB 2525). Outdoor exercise is preferred because it provides a natural environment for the dog, something they would experience in any other situation.

At the heart of every good infectious disease control program is proper and complete sanitation. Following the measures set forth in HB 2525 will allow for the most complete disinfection in a kennel situation possible. Many of the disease agents I encounter on a daily basis at the Humane League are difficult to kill pathogens. I am proud of the sanitation program we have at the Humane League, which incorporates a lot of if not all of the changes proposed in HB 2525. Many of the kennels which I have been asked to comment on in court cases for the Bureau of Dog Law fail on sanitation solely because they do not have a proper sanitation program. HB 2525 ensures that all kennels must clean properly, and this change allows for the healthiest possible dogs to sell and/or breed.

Finally, I would like to say I sincerely support and applaud the efforts of HB 2525 to completely involve a licensed veterinarian in the operations of these kennels. Veterinarians like me have the unique and advanced expertise in the areas of animal health and welfare. We are more than willing to share this expertise to allow these animals to live as good a life as possible in a kennel situation. By ensuring that all dogs are examined by a veterinarian at least once yearly (ideally and more likely twice annually) many of the chronic problems I see in these kennel dogs such as severe matting, long toe-nails, severe dental disease, tumors, eye and ear infections, and lameness can be better controlled and treated. This prevents it from approaching a chronic state that causes the animal pain, discomfort, fear, and distress. Specifically, I endorse the provision that a veterinarian be involved in the protocols and infectious disease control of the kennel. I also endorse the provision that only a licensed veterinarian can euthanize an animal in these kennels, ensuring a humane death. Finally, I endorse the requirement of only a licensed veterinarian giving a rabies vaccine to eligible dogs. This provision will prevent the confusion over validity of rabies vaccines in kennel dogs that exist under the old regulations as well as prevent unnecessary multiple vaccinations that could cause medical issues in the dog. By having a licensed

veterinarian as part of the kennel team, it ensures the health and well being of the dogs and also gives the kennel an increased credibility with the public when they purchase dogs from the kennel.

In closing, I would again like to sincerely thank all of you for your attentiveness to this issue and for allowing me to speak freely on my thoughts regarding this legislation. Some may view the changes proposed as excessive and unnecessary, but speaking from a non-biased purely medical and welfare point of view, all the provisions have sound medical basis and are presented only for the health and well being of the dogs in these kennels. I welcome the opportunity to answer any of your questions.