

Testimony by Jamie Kasarda, Executive Director, on behalf of the Cumberland Valley Animal Shelter:

Mr. Chairmen:

I appear before the House Committee on Agriculture & Rural Affairs today in support of House Bill 2525. As a licensed veterinary medical technician, and advocate of progressive animal sheltering, and especially as the Executive Director of the Cumberland Valley Animal Shelter in Chambersburg, I plead to the dedicated and informed members of this committee to seize the opportunity to improve the lives of dogs in Pennsylvania. I believe HB 2525 does just that.

I have reviewed HB 2525 at length and consider it a detailed, encompassing piece of legislation that clarifies the state's expectations pertaining to the licensing, sheltering, as well as overall care and treatment of dogs in licensed kennels in Pennsylvania. This bill not only clarifies licensing, housing and veterinary care requirements, but thoroughly explains how these laws will be enforced and the penalties for breaking them.

In my view, many of the requirements seem like common sense measures to ensure proper care and management of dogs living in kennels. For instance, I oversee operations of a non-profit kennel. The Cumberland Valley Animal Shelter, that handles anywhere from 600-800 dogs every year, has minimal staff, a few dedicated volunteers, and a penny-pinching budget. Despite income challenges, employee turnover, and the rising number of homeless and/or abandoned dogs coming into our care every year, CVAS manages to have solid floor dog runs covered in epoxy for easy sanitation, every dog receives all necessary veterinary treatments, fresh food and water daily, is groomed as needed, walked on grass daily, socialized, spayed or neutered, and respected. I find it difficult to believe that profitable commercial kennels can not meet a similar standard.

Unfortunately, we may always have those who feel that dogs are great cash crops, puppy machines that bring in big dollars; contributing to the consumer mentality that dogs are disposable. Meanwhile, humane societies, SPCA's, and animal shelters alike are overloaded with unwanted dogs and often struggling to meet the demands of the community. I can only hope that better defined regulations, like those stated in HB 2525, will increase awareness of what is humane treatment; starting from the very place the dogs may originate. It is time to put an end to vague laws that leave room for the mistreatment of dogs in commercial breeding facilities. It is time to enact a bill that will provide for stiffer penalties and ease of enforcement. HB 2525 sends a message to kennel owners in our state that the inhumane treatment of dogs will no longer be tolerated.