



Rendell visits for ceremonial signing of dog law reform

By: **DANNY ADLER** (Tue, Oct/28/2008)

At a recent rally in the state capital, Gov. Ed Rendell was joined by one of his dogs, Maggie, a breeder dog for two and a half years. Maggie sat silently by the governor's side, and when the governor barked, "So let's get to work and get this bill passed," Maggie chimed in with a few barks of her own.

At a ceremonial signing of Pennsylvania's new dog laws in Middletown Monday afternoon, Rendell said, "This is good news for dogs."

As the words came out of his mouth, a nearby dog in the crowd let out a few barks. The pooch must've agreed.

Rendell was joined by state lawmakers, local officials, dog law advocates and veterinarians at the Center for Animal Referral and Emergency Services, or CARES, during the ceremonial signing of the new law, which brings "sweeping reform" to the state's dog laws.

"We the people of Pennsylvania, we the dog lovers of Pennsylvania, decided that Pennsylvania's time had come to end being called the 'puppy mill of the east.' And we did that," Rendell said.

The new law, which officially was signed by the governor Oct. 9, imposes strict standards on commercial kennels. Act 119 allows only veterinarians to euthanize dogs in commercial breeding kennels while calling for at least twice-a-year veterinary exams. The law doubles the required floor space for dogs, eliminates wire flooring and requires exercise and 24-hour access to water. Previously, dogs were not ever required to be taken from their cages.

Rendell said the bill makes way for the state to be a leader in protecting dogs in commercial breeding kennels. Rendell called for the new law in August after officials said 80 dogs were shot and killed by operators of two eastern Pennsylvania kennels. The shootings followed an order for some of the animals to be examined by veterinarians.

CARES is a specialty and emergency veterinary hospital with specialty-level care in internal medicine, oncology, ophthalmology, radiology and surgery, and has helped more than 10,000 pets a year. The group sees a lot of puppies coming out of puppy mills, officials said.

Dr. Jon Rappaport, CARES director and co-founder, said many of the puppies suffer from infectious diseases — including respiratory infections — and gastrointestinal problems. The infections are easily spread to the pups due to overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in how commercial kennels were operated.

Sarah Speed, the state director for the Humane Society of the United States, said they've waited decades for this "incredible bill," but there's still some work to do. "No law is worth anything, the paper it's written on, unless it's being enforced effectively."

One of the main reasons families surrender their dogs is due to behavioral issues that stem from puppy mills, said Cori Menkin, senior director of legislative initiatives with the ASPCA.

"We have puppies being taken out of the mills at a very early age. Most of them show up in the pet store at about eight weeks of age, and because of that they're not given enough time with their litter mates and their mother. ... It's a pretty critical time for puppies."

State Rep. Chris King, D-142, who co-sponsored the bill, and state Sen. Michael Brubaker, R-Lancaster, both praised Harrisburg's bipartisan cooperation in pushing through the bill.

Rendell got Maggie from a rescue organization, the governor's office said. She was no longer used for breeding after one of her litters was stillborn. Maggie would have continued to give birth for a few years and then "basically be thrown away," if she wasn't rescued, Rendell said.

"Maggie was one of the lucky ones, because most dogs kept in those conditions, most dogs who are kept in wire hutches, not only suffer physical problems but suffer tremendous behavioral problems," he said.

"Maggie must have been touched by God," a choked-up Rendell said, "because she is the happiest dog I've ever had in my life."

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