



REPRESENTATIVE CASEY WEINSTEIN
HOUSE DISTRICT 34

House Agriculture Committee
HB 539 Sponsor Testimony

June 11, 2024

Chairman Jones, Vice Chair Klopfenstein, Ranking Member Brent, and Members of the Agriculture Committee: Thank you for allowing my joint sponsor, Representative Brown, and I the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony for HB 539. After seeing Ohio be ranked second in the nation in the Humane Society’s “Horrible Hundred” report and hearing about the puppy mill fire in Morrow County that took the lives of 70 dogs, we knew that something needed to be done to improve the living conditions of these animals. We believe that holding puppy mills more accountable will significantly better the lives of the dogs being bred and sold in our state. HB 539 revises the law governing high volume dog breeders in three aspects: inspections, surgical procedures, and the definition of what constitutes a “high volume dog breeder”.

I want to echo and emphasize what my joint sponsor just said about the importance of our changes to the revised code. Our first change regarding unannounced inspections is a commonsense change. I would argue that all three of them are. Currently, by giving a two-day notice, high volume dog breeders, not in compliance with ODA standards can quickly cover their tracks and get away

with continuing harmful practices. We want to see this change so that those not in compliance cannot escape repercussions and problematic establishments are not empowered to continue their behavior.

We just heard from my joint sponsor that currently veterinarians are not required to perform all surgical and cosmetic procedures happening in these establishments. Even if we cannot all agree on the ethicality of cosmetic procedures, we should all agree that if they are being performed, they should be happening under the care of a licensed and qualified veterinarian. We were horrified by the violations found in our state listed in the “Horrible Hundred” report. Dog breeders using rusty scissors, human nail clippers, horse hoof trimmers, and box cutters for tail docking and dewclaw removal. Amputating a dog’s tail for cosmetic reasons is already controversial - even when performed by a veterinarian with the correct tools, anesthesia, and pain medicine - but docking a dog’s tail with a box cutter is just plain cruel. These dogs deserve better and our simple change to the revised code can help ensure that these cruel practices do not happen in our state - at least not without consequence.

Lastly, after meeting with interested parties we believe the “high volume dog breeder” definition needed to be revised for this bill to have the most impact. Currently, to be considered a high-volume dog breeder in Ohio you have to a. house 6 or more breeding dogs for selling purposes and b. sell at least 40 dogs in a calendar year. The second requirement becomes problematic when many of the breeders do not keep records. ODA and the USDA have stated that this is a

problem themselves. If we already see such violations with licensed breeders, we can only imagine what the unlicensed breeders operating behind the shadows are doing. A puppy from a puppy mill can cost up to \$3000. Under current law, you can sell 39 of these dogs, make \$117,000 a year, and still not be considered a high-volume dog breeder. Even assuming you make as low as 30% of that in profit, that is still over \$35,000 a year. A significant amount of money is being made by handling living creatures that end up going to families across the country. Dog breeders should and must be held to a higher standard. As sponsors of the bill, we are confident that a clearer definition will bring problematic actors into licensing so that they too can be subject to ODA inspections.

I want to conclude by stating that most other states just use the number of breeding females for their “high volume dog breeder” definition. This is true for all our neighbors except for Pennsylvania which has been known to have a problem with puppy mills themselves, ranking 6th in the nation in the “Horrible Hundred” report. We have proposed these commonsense changes after hearing the reports from ODA, animal rescuers, and animal activists about the inhumane treatment of these dogs. As state representatives, we must listen to the voices of rescuers and animal activists as they are the ones doing the hard work, witnessing the realities of animal suffering, and dedicating their lives to making a difference. We cannot turn a blind eye to violence. For that reason, I strongly urge your support of HB 539. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. We will be happy to answer any questions.