

**March 10, 2020**

**COMMENTS OF THE MINNESOTA PET BREEDERS ASSOCIATION to the Minnesota House of Representatives' Government Operations Committee**

In 2014 the Minnesota Legislature passed a bill that established regulations for commercial breeders and a system to monitor them, correct deficiencies, and impose penalties for noncompliance with the standards. This new function was generously funded – the appropriation was actually at the level proposed by the proponents of the bill, who had conjectured that there were three times as many dog and cat breeders that would come within the new statutory definition of commercial breeder than have actually been found in the five years since licensing became required.

I'll be referring to dogs in these remarks, as there are only a handful of commercial cat breeders in Minnesota and most of the concern about animal welfare in pet breeding is focused on dogs.

The Board of Animal Health has carried out its mission of licensing commercial breeders and monitoring their performance according to the standards set in statute. Protocols were established for veterinary care and documentation of health records and examinations and for management of health issues. The Board has regularly updated the Minnesota Pet Breeders Association on the developments in this program at our annual educational seminar (which has been held since 2006, years before the licensing program came into existence). Some breeders had to make adjustments in their facilities or practices to come into compliance. Some chose not to do so, and stopped breeding at a commercial level. I am aware there has been one commercial breeder – and I don't know who that is – who became licensed, later was found to need to make corrections in facilities or practices, declined to comply and whose license was then revoked.

The Board of Animal Health has many years of experience monitoring conditions under which animals are raised and sold in commerce. There is no need to duplicate these functions in a new agency, and certainly no need to replace them and vest them in a new agency whose relevant experience is not in raising animals, but is limited to the care of homeless pets in shelter facilities or the rehoming of pets by "rescue" organizations, which are completely unregulated because they do not maintain facilities for housing pets and thus not addressed in the statutes. You may not be aware that the Board also licenses and inspects Minnesota pet shelters. They are called "kennels" under the law. In 1967 – more than 50 years ago - the legislature enacted a law requiring that organizations sheltering homeless pets operate according to standards set, monitored and enforced by the State Livestock Sanitation Board, a predecessor to the Board of Animal Health. Thus, regulating commercial breeders was not a novel or mysterious responsibility thrust upon on the Board in 2014; it was a variation of a program that had been ongoing for decades, the major difference being that the kennels – pet shelters – were looking after pets that had been lost or abandoned or neglected or mistreated,

while commercial breeders are professionals who ethically, competently, and responsibly raise dogs intended to become family pets or partners with hunters, livestock farmers and ranchers, law enforcement, people with disabilities, and to perform other specific tasks that require inherent talent and training to bring to an effective level – in other words, purpose-bred dogs. This expansion of the Board’s responsibilities was set in a foundation provided by years of experience with oversight of kennels – pet shelters – as can be seen by the similarities in the standards and inspection guidelines for the pet sheltering and pet breeding programs. These are linked on a page of the Board’s website at <https://www.bah.state.mn.us/dogs-cats/>

Commercial breeders, like all pet owners, have to comply with Minnesota’s humane laws as well as the commercial breeder licensing standards. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals statutes are set forth in Chapter 343, with some supporting provisions in Chapters 346 and 347. There is a system for enforcing the broad-based humane laws that is completely separate from the licensing and inspection of pet shelters (kennels) and commercial breeders, although the two systems are required to communicate relevant information with each other.

There are many more details I could provide about the regulation of commercial pet breeders by the Board of Animal Health and various other entities, and I would be happy to respond to questions to have a conversation with anyone who would like to learn more about them, but your focus today is the proposal to set up a new agency that would supposedly somehow “replace” the expertise of the Board of Animal Health with a group that has long been concerned with a very different aspect of the role animals play on our lives, and is seeking to branch out into a new venture. That would be a needless and very inappropriate use of the state’s limited resources, and I urge you to vote no on HF3584.

Elaine Hanson

Legislative Chair

Minnesota Pet Breeders Association

612-824-0412

[elainehanson@mail.com](mailto:elainehanson@mail.com)