



Durbin Urges USDA to Increase Enforcement of Illegal Puppy Mills

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) has urged the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to increase enforcement of the *Animal Welfare Act* to prevent operation of illegal puppy mills throughout the country. In a letter to USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue, Durbin cited a recent [report](#) where a breeder in Georgia was arrested after he amassed more than 700 dogs and had been keeping them in filthy and uninhabitable conditions. Durbin questioned why USDA has begun a pilot program that gives breeder's advance notice of inspections, and that citations of breeders have dropped each year since 2016.

“This breeder, operating under the name Georgia Puppies, was state licensed and was selling puppies online through its own website and on third-party sites like puppyfind.com. With his public online operations, did USDA take any steps to investigate this breeder?” Durbin wrote. **“Although limited by resources, USDA must ensure breeders, like the man in Georgia, are adhering to animal welfare rules and are being regularly inspected.”**

For years, Durbin has worked to reign in these illegal puppy mills. In 2017, Durbin [called](#) on the Trump Administration to immediately restore animal cruelty information purged from the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website. In 2011, he introduced the [Puppy Uniform Protection and Safety Act](#), also known as the *PUPS Act*, which would require all breeders who sell more than 50 dogs a year to obtain a license from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), including those that sell dogs online.

Full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below:

April 16, 2019

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I write USDA regarding enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act with pet breeders. Last month, authorities arrested a Georgia breeder that had amassed more than 700 dogs and had been keeping them in filthy and uninhabitable conditions. I urge USDA to increase enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act to prevent these types of breeders from continuing to operate.

Although some breeders take every step to providing safe and humane conditions for the pets they breed, many put profits over the care of the health and safety of the animals. The breeder in Georgia reflects the importance of USDA inspections of breeders to ensure they are properly caring for their animals. This breeder had amassed more than 700 hundred puppies before his facility was inspected and these puppies were rescued. The conditions they were being kept in were abhorrent—dogs in crates were stacked one on top of the other that were rarely, if ever, taken out. Photos taken of the rescued puppies reflected the terrible conditions—many of the puppies had matted hair and were covered in feces. This breeder, operating under the name Georgia Puppies, was state licensed and was selling puppies online through its own website and on third-party sites like puppyfind.com. With his public online operations, did USDA take any steps to investigate this breeder?

Enforcement of existing regulations could prevent situations similar to the one in Georgia from happening. But in the last year, USDA inspectors documented 60 percent fewer violations at animal facilities. Since 2016, USDA citations of breeders have dropped each year. These changes in violations seem to be too significant to attribute to increased compliance by breeders.

For decades, USDA has routinely conducted surprise inspections, preventing breeders from taking steps to hide violations of the Animal Welfare Act. But, last April, USDA began a pilot program where it provides breeders advance notice of inspection. This pilot limits USDA's enforcement ability and could allow breeders to skirt the Animal Welfare Act.

For many years, I have worked to ensure breeders raise dogs in decent, humane conditions and that they receive proper care. In 2011, I introduced the Puppy Uniform Protection and Safety Act, also known as the PUPS Act, which would require all breeders who sell more than 50 dogs a year to obtain a license from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), including those that sell dogs online. Although this bill never became law, under the Obama Administration, USDA took steps to require breeders that sell puppies online, similar to the man in Georgia, to be inspected and regulated.

Despite our efforts in Congress, and the work of advocacy groups like the Humane Society, there are still breeders who don't provide the proper care for the pets they are raising to sell. Although limited by resources, USDA must ensure breeders, like the man

in Georgia, are adhering to animal welfare rules and are being regularly inspected. I ask USDA to review the use of its resources and focus more attention on large, problematic dealers like Georgia Puppies. I look forward to hearing from you.