

June 18, 2024

The Honorable Mike DeWine
77 S High St, 30th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor DeWine:

A major divide exists in Ohio. While Ohioans consider pets to be cherished family members, puppy mills in our state treat thousands of dogs like breeding machines and their puppies like mere products. Animals suffer greatly in these facilities, but the impact of puppy mills extends beyond the confines of a cramped, dirty cage. All of us who help companion animals in Ohio-- humane societies, animal rescues, welfare organizations, veterinarians, and those who support their work-- feel the effects and deal with the consequences. Collectively, we urge your administration to take action to address Ohio's long-standing puppy mill problem.

In 2018, hundreds of thousands of Ohioans signed petitions demanding humane standards for high volume dog breeders. Polling conducted by Lake Research Partners showed that 77 percent of voters would support such a measure, with 60 percent of those voters indicating strong support. In response, Ohio amended its law to significantly strengthen the standards of care for high volume breeders, which included providing necessities like solid flooring for dogs to rest their paws, clean food and water, appropriate enclosures, opportunities to exercise, and proper veterinary care.

Nonetheless, year after year, inspection records from the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) provide evidence of bad actors in the high volume breeding community: sick or injured dogs not receiving the veterinary care they need; dogs and puppies living in wire cages that are dirty with feces and have other sanitation problems; and breeders performing DIY surgery or euthanizing dogs without a veterinarian. In 2020, a licensed Ohio breeder even admitted that a Yorkshire terrier died while they attempted to perform an in-house dental cleaning.

Under existing law, the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) is authorized to take strong enforcement action against state-licensed dog breeders who bring harm to the dogs and puppies under their care. Despite years of advocacy and overwhelming public support, however, ODA has declined to use most of the enforcement tools at its disposal (see attached letter to ODA from the Humane Society of the United States). While the ODA has issued fines in some cases, they have been ineffective in curbing Ohio's puppy mill problem.

A law is only as good as its enforcement, and unfortunately, in Ohio, that enforcement is unacceptable. Despite having one of the strictest high volume breeder laws in the country, Ohio is still widely recognized as among the worst states for puppy mill activity; in fact, it ranks #2 in the Humane Society of the United States' 2024 Horrible Hundred report, which lists 100 problem puppy breeders and dealers in the United States. It must be our goal to never see Ohio in this report again. To end the suffering of these animals, Ohio needs to exercise its authority to shut down puppy mills with egregious violations.

It's clear that Ohio is a state that cares about animals. But upholding the values of pet-loving Ohioans requires significant changes to the way we enforce our high volume dog breeder standards. Otherwise, unsuspecting families will continue to be sold high-priced puppies who lack socialization or face serious

health concerns, and the puppy mills they came from will continue to overload our local humane societies and rescues with an avalanche of dumped dogs.

Governor DeWine, Ohioans are looking to our chief executive for leadership on this issue. We respectfully request that you direct ODA to use every tool at its disposal to enforce our commercial dog breeding laws. In doing so, you can usher in a new era in Ohio—one that protects pets and families, allows responsible businesses to thrive, and demonstrates Ohio’s commitment to defending the most vulnerable among us.

Thank you,



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**



**Ohio
Animal Welfare
Federation**
Helping People Help Animals



**Animal Welfare
Institute**



**Faithful Forgotten
Best Friends**



**Champaign County
Animal Welfare League**



**Animal House
Rescue**

**toledo
humane
society**



**OHIO
ANIMAL
ADVOCATES**



**ANIMAL LEGAL
DEFENSE FUND**

MBR FARM
boarding & training



**Wood County
Humane Society**

**United Spay
ALLIANCE**



Rock



Humane Societies

Champaign County Animal Welfare League
Fayette Regional Humane Society
Fulton County Humane Society
Toledo Humane Society
Wood County Humane Society

Animal Rescues

Animal House Rescue
MBR Farm
RESCUEDohio
Stop the Suffering

Animal Welfare Organizations

Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Welfare Institute
Humane Society of the United States
Ohio Animal Advocates
Ohio Animal Welfare Federation
United Spay Alliance

Veterinary & Pet Services

Faithful Forgotten Best Friends
Lee Schrader, DVM, Diplomate, ACVIM
Licking County TNR
Rascal Unit
Rural Ohio Cats & Kittens