

Stop Puppy Mills Ohio FAQ

What is a puppy mill?

Puppy mills are dog breeding facilities that treat breeding dogs like cash crops and puppies as products. The wellbeing of the dogs is disregarded in order to maintain low overhead and increase profits. Breeding dogs spend their entire lives in small cages and suffer immensely both physically and psychologically. Consumers who buy a puppy mill puppy often end up with a pet with health and behavioral problems who has trouble adjusting to family life because she knows nothing but life in a cage. That being said, everyone has a different idea of what constitutes a puppy mill. For some, any commercial breeding facility is a puppy mill, while for others, a commercial breeding facility where dogs are treated humanely, able to run and play with other dogs, and receive affection from humans would not be a puppy mill.

Are puppy mills legal?

Each state addresses puppy mills differently. Some have no laws at all regulating commercial dog breeding, while others have comprehensive licensing and regulation schemes with standards of care which must be provided. While some commercial breeders are regulated under the federal Animal Welfare Act, enforcement of the federal law is problematic and the standards are weak. No state or federal law bans “puppy mills.”

Don't we already have a law against this in Ohio?

Yes, but Ohio continues to be an infamous puppy mill state, second only to Missouri in number of federally licensed commercial breeding facilities. We estimate that there are at least 1000 puppy mills in the state, likely far more, and tens of thousands of dogs suffering in them. Current Ohio standards of care are weak, allowing dogs to spend their lives in cramped, stacked, and largely wired cages without exercise or proper veterinary care. Documented abuses on Ohio puppy mills include not providing veterinary care for severely injured and diseased dogs, allowing dogs to live in filthy, unsafe structures, and denying dogs sufficient food and water.

How will this measure stop puppy mills?

This measure will stop puppy mill cruelty by upgrading the current high-volume dog breeder law. The standards of care in the measure will require that dogs be allowed to move around freely in clean enclosures with solid flooring, have proper food and water, exercise, socialize, and receive proper veterinary care. Mother dogs will no longer be bred continuously. The measure will also protect Ohio families from unknowingly supporting cruel puppy mills and ending up with sick and behaviorally challenged puppies, because commercial breeders—regardless of where they are located—will have to adhere to these humane standards if they sell to Ohio consumers.

How will this be enforced?

A big part of the current enforcement problem in Ohio is that only those who sell at least 9 litters and 60 puppies per calendar year are required to be licensed and inspected. The Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) itself has stated this rule is very difficult to enforce, leaving nearly 900 breeders on their “action list” of facilities that may meet this threshold, but that are not currently licensed and inspected. In contrast, this measure puts forth a clear threshold for coverage based on the number of breeding females in a facility. This will be far easier to enforce. It also sets humane standards, allowing enforcement agents to cite nearly any issue deemed inhumane. For the sales portion of the measure, ODA will likely monitor sellers on a complaint basis and by reviewing required certificate of veterinary inspection for dogs imported into Ohio.

Will this cost taxpayers' money?

The Stop Puppy Mills Ohio campaign is funded entirely by donations from organizations and individuals who believe in our mission. When the provisions of the measures become law it is likely that the Ohio Dept. of Agriculture will have more commercial breeders to regulate than it currently does, but that will be funded largely by licensing fees.

Why do we need to amend the constitution?

While there are legislators who are very committed to protecting animals, there are others who continue to block animal protection laws or insist they be watered down. It is crucial that the protections for dogs in this measure be incorporated into the Ohio constitution because that is the only way to ensure they stand. In Missouri, the largest puppy mill state, voters approved similar protections, but the legislature repealed many of them, overriding the will of the people. We can't let that happen in Ohio.

Why is the threshold for coverage 8 or more breeding females?

Breeders with 8 or more unsprayed female dogs kept for the purpose of breeding and selling their offspring will be held to the standards in this measure. Basing a threshold on breeding females is much easier to enforce, and prove, than the threshold in current law based number of sales and litters produced. Hundreds of additional puppy mills will likely be regulated under this measure than are regulated under current law, and of course the standards of care are much stronger. There is no perfect number of breeding females, and no specific cut-off that separates a responsible breeder from a puppy mill, but there has to be a threshold in this measure because Ohioans likely wouldn't approve a measure that regulated all breeders, including small, home-based ones. Plus, breeders responsible for the industrial-scale cruelty that runs rampant in Ohio operate puppy mills with far more than 8 breeding females.

Who will oppose this measure?

Only those who profit from puppy mill cruelty will have any reason to oppose this measure. This measure is needed because Ohio has a thriving puppy mill industry. We expect that industry to organize and oppose this measure because they prefer the status quo. One of the largest regulated entities in the state, Petland, supports the measure, but it is unclear what position other pet stores, internet sellers, trade groups, and national and local breed clubs who profit from puppy mill cruelty will take.

What about the Amish?

While there are Amish breeders in Ohio that we would consider puppy mills, it's important to note that over breeding dogs in terrible conditions is seen throughout the nation, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, religion or otherwise. Puppy mills are the result of no one community but rather a collective mindset that animals, including dogs, are "things" rather than "beings." This measure treats all commercial breeders equally and there are no religious exemptions.