Across the nation, breeders and owners of purebred dogs are under legislative attack by organizations whose agenda includes ending our great tradition of purebred dogs as family pets and working companions. It’s not surprising, then, that one of the most common questions we hear is, what’s the AKC doing about canine legislation?

The AKC is doing a lot. Some of AKC Government Relations (GR) accomplishments include tracking more than 1,000 state and local bills/ordinances each year. GR has conducted, on average, two public training sessions a month throughout the country. AKC GR has made thousands of individual contacts with legislators; launched two newsletters and an online legislative tracking system; and expanded our outreach to the public and the fancy in person, online and in publications. With our federations, AKC has been on the frontlines of successful legislative battles in California, Illinois, Indiana, Oklahoma, New York, North Carolina and many other states.

The Role of AKC in Canine Legislation

Recently, the AKC Board reviewed the role of the AKC with respect to the increasing legislative pressures faced by dog breeders and owners. The Board reaffirmed the role of AKC with respect to the part of the AKC’s mission statement that pledges to work to protect the rights of all dog owners and promote responsible dog ownership. The AKC Government Relations Department is charged with implementing these objectives on a daily basis and ensuring that laws governing dog ownership and breeding are reasonable, enforceable and non-discriminatory.

Advocacy works best when those who are directly affected by it take the lead in working with legislators. Legislators want to create laws that voters can support. Success in canine legislation requires involvement by those who will be affected by it. Hence, the AKC does not regularly send staffers out to legislative trouble spots, but instead provides educational, informational and training resources that enable the residents of a community—those most affected by the laws—to take the lead in working for policies that best address their needs.

As part of the individual responsibility that comes with being a good dog owner, the AKC encourages all dog owners to know, understand, and follow the laws of their jurisdictions. The AKC cannot provide legal advice or advocate on behalf of individuals who have broken local dog laws.

How AKC Government Relations Can Help You

The Government Relations Department is composed of staff who have a broad range of experience in politics at the local, state and federal levels. At the federal level, the AKC also retains a team of federal advocates from the firm of Greenberg Traurig in Washington, D.C.

The GR Department provides a wide variety of resources to support clubs, federations, breeders and individuals in protecting their rights. Some of the resources AKC GR offers include:

- Tracking and reviewing legislation to determine potential impact on breeders, owners, fanciers and the dog-owning public. This includes a dynamic online legislative tracking system that lets you track canine legislation in any state of the union and on Capitol Hill.
- Online legislative alerts and bill synopses, a monthly newsletter, a quarterly Federal newsletter, and the ability to contact thousands of AKC constituents about legislation that may threaten them. Alerts may be sent out to broad groups of individuals or narrow segments of specific target populations, depending on the issue involved. Nearly all legislative alerts provide next steps to help individuals contact their legislators as well as specific information about the AKC’s perspective on the measure introduced.
- Statements of AKC issue opposition or support targeted to local, state or federal officials. These statements are specific to the particular bill and the community affected by the bill. GR also provides background data, analysis, and other intelligence to...
ensure that legislation is reasonable, enforceable
and nondiscriminatory.
• Issue-based policy expertise including policy briefs,
model legislation, and alternate language to
legislators, clubs, federations, and individuals
involved in the development of canine policy.

A Few Words about Process
The first thing GR does when it learns about a
potentially damaging bill is to research the measure
and conduct an analysis of its impact. In addition to
assistance provided to clubs, federations and
individuals, GR also may contact lawmakers,
negotiate language, educate officials about sensible
dog laws and responsible ownership, and suggest
alternatives to restrictive breeding laws or bans.

Some of the department’s work is conducted
outside the public eye. While it may sometimes
appear that the AKC is not actively involved in the
legislative process, this is not the case. Some of the
GR department’s greatest successes are the bills you
never hear about—those that have never been formally
introduced or have never made it past committee
hearings.

Other times, legislation and legislative issues are
best addressed by public support or opposition. This
is when the GR Department issues legislative alerts
or news items and provides constituents with sample
letters and talking points. In some cases, staff may
conduct legislative training sessions or lobby days.

_How does the AKC decide which bills to support or
oppose?_ The AKC GR Department bases its bill
positions on the AKC’s Board-approved canine
legislative position statements, which are available on
the AKC web site at

AKC GR tracks on average more than 1,000 dog-
related measures at the state, local and federal level.
To maintain this heavy workload, AKC GR depends
on its friends and colleagues throughout the nation
for grassroots legislative information, support and
participation.

What You Can Do
As a responsible AKC dog owner/breeder, you
have a special opportunity and responsibility to make
your voice heard in representing the interests of
responsible dog owners in your club(s) and the
community.

Most politicians know very little about dogs and
even less about breeding and the fancy.

Educating our legislators—_especially before an issue
ever comes up_—is one of the most important things
you can do to ensure dog owners and breeders
interests are served when canine legislation is
introduced.

• Set up a 10-minute appointment with your local
representatives; introduce yourself and offer to
provide insight on dog issues. This will give you
access if canine legislation is introduced in the
future.

• Make sure all your clubs have Legislative Liaisons
and work within a state federation. GR depends on
liaisons and federations as two-way information
channels to learn about possible local ordinances
and to get the word out about new legislation. If
GR does not hear about a local issue, we cannot
help. If clubs and individuals do not get our
information, they cannot respond to it.

• Support—and encourage your club to support—the
AKC Canine Legislative Support Fund (CLSF). This
fund helps support legislative empowerment seminars
at national specialties and all-breed shows, state-wide
lobby days, the development of advocacy training
programs, and other advocacy efforts.

For more information or assistance, call the AKC GR
Department at 919-816-3720, email doglaw@akc.org, or
visit www.akc.org/canine_legislation.

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