

Legislature should have advanced the puppy-mill bill

Statesman Journal Editorial Board, Published 8:53 p.m. PT February 15, 2018

We're disappointed the Legislature shelved House Bill 4045, which would have required dogs sold in pet stores to come from animal shelters, human societies, dog-control districts, or rescues.

Despite widespread public support, the Oregon Legislature couldn't schedule a committee vote by the Feb. 9 deadline, which effectively killed the bill.

This means unscrupulous dog breeders will have another year to sell dogs in Oregon pet stores who have been generally raised in overcrowded, caged, and unsanitary conditions without routine veterinary care, adequate food, water, or socialization.

This should have been a slam dunk.

Lawmakers said they will consider a larger crackdown on this type of pet sales in the 2019 session. But how hard would it have been to send the message in 2018 that this form of animal abuse won't be tolerated in the Beaver State?

BJ Andersen, executive director of the Willamette Human Society, said the shelter supported HB 4045, but wanted the law to do more. She said the legislation should include cats because even though they're not as much of a pet-store problem, there are still more cats available to adopt than the community has homes for.

"There is an opportunity for Oregon to continue to lead the nation in animal-welfare legislation with this bill; this needs to pass," Andersen said.

Puppies are rarely available to adopt at places such as WHS, the Marion County Dog Shelter, and other organizations like them because shelters don't often get them. Yet a market for puppies remains because most everyone wants a cute and cuddly little scamp with big eyes and an indomitable spirit.

Shelters such as the WHS can't hang to dogs aged 1 to 7 years for long. They are so easy to adopt that they typically last only four to seven days in the shelter.

It is young and under-socialized dogs who have behavioral or health issues that wind up staying in shelters longer and straining resources. They take more food, veterinary care, and staff and volunteer time.

These dogs can remain in shelters six months or longer, said Andersen, and require shelters to put much more time into their care.

This doesn't mean that the Willamette Humane Society is anti-breeder. Anyone who buys directly from a breeder can bring their pet to WHS for training, for instance.

Educating the public remains a priority for WHS because helping the public understand how to avoid dogs bred at a puppy mill reduces the likelihood the animals will end up in a shelter.

Some pet stores are already moving away from selling animals to avoid the puppy-mill issue. This is a trend we hope the public supports by shopping at stores that sell supplies not animals.

And tell your lawmaker that you want Oregon to continue to lead the nation in animal welfare legislation. Amend House Bill 4045 to include cats, and pass it.