

My name is Darla Feeheley and I am a Baltimore County resident. I have been the director of a nonprofit dog rescue and partnered with animal shelters in Maryland and surrounding states. I worked on reform of our own Baltimore County Animal Shelter with state legislation, testimony, working alongside state and county representatives and advocates. I am co-author of Oscar's Law, Baltimore County Bill 23-18, passed unanimously on April 30, 2018. The bill was named after a dog who froze to death in its own yard after hours in extreme cold, unable to retreat indoors through the false security of an unsupervised dog door. House bill HB 406 sponsored by Delegate Mary Lehman mirrors that bill and would extend protection of pets in adverse environmental conditions statewide.

My testimony today isn't why we should pass this law – as many of my fellow advocates and colleagues here will testify to. My testimony will address those who will come here today and speak against legislation designed to enforce protection and humane treatment of animals.

When testimony was open to be heard in 2018 at the county level, it was inconceivable who would find issue with treating animals (dogs more specifically) humanely. To the surprise of some – a member of the AKC (American Kennel Club) came to the Baltimore County courtroom to contest the law stating his breeding dogs were hardy enough to withstand the harsh elements. Please be aware that anyone can be an AKC member if they pay for registration – the AKC membership **does not make them an expert witness** for humane treatment of animals.

This person testifying against the county bill, using his AKC membership as an alleged authority on the treatment of dogs, had several animal control complaints lodged against him from those who lived near him or drove by the property seeing and hearing dogs kept outdoors in less than adequate protection against weather elements. Dogs he kept in a shoddy substandard outdoor kennel at the end of his property that had no shade, no heat, no flooring and little contact with humans as companion animals. His sole purpose was to breed them that would provide him income by selling the puppies. His defiance to provide proper shelter within the seemingly common-sense humane parameters of the proposed law was because it would take away from his AKC member bottom-line profit.

The more dogs registered with the AKC, the richer the organization gets. The organization's PAC then fights many laws that would protect dogs. Follow the money - the more puppies breeders produce and then register with the AKC, the better for the AKC's bottom line.

My testimony today is to educate and provide a retort to those who would testify against the bill that lay arguments that this legislation would force them to invest in proper protection against environmental conditions for the health and well-being of their breeding dogs. A law that would protect dogs raised, mistreated and neglected by unscrupulous breeders. A law that would force these breeders to invest in proper care - a cost and effort that would allegedly affect their profit yet provide necessary humane care of their animals.

It is a cruel irony when an organization such as the AKC touts itself as a champion of dogs works behind closed doors to oppose animal welfare bills, including those advanced to crack down on cruel unscrupulous breeding. But that is exactly what the American Kennel Club has been doing for years opposing every animal protection measure in every state including protections with legislation like this bill for dogs left outdoors. Consumers who support the AKC through pet registrations and dog show fees have no idea that some of their dollars are being used to lobby against the interests of dogs. Far from being a champion of dogs, the AKC, by opposing animal welfare bills, enables the bad guys – the ones responsible for animal cruelty, suffering, and neglect – to win. We didn't let the AKC's testimony win in Baltimore County and we can't let that happen here at the state level. Please pass House Bill 406 for the common-sense protection of Maryland's animals so Maryland can champion humane treatment and be a leader for other states as well.