

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF CHARLEY HALL

American Kennel Club Opposition to HB 1551

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Kennel Club (AKC), the Responsible Dog Owners of Maryland (RDO-MD) and more than 70 dog clubs and thousands of responsible dog owners in Maryland, I submit this testimony regarding HB 1551.

While we appreciate the sponsor's, Delegate Metzgar, willingness to discuss amendments, the American Kennel Club must respectfully **oppose House Bill 1551** as currently drafted.

House Bill 1551 creates significant economic and administrative burdens by establishing a new statewide breeder registration system, per-puppy certificate fees, and additional documentation requirements that would directly impact small, home-based breeders who operate as micro-businesses. Even a breeder with one modest litter per year would face substantial recurring costs and new administrative hurdles. These mandates would disproportionately affect responsible Maryland residents who already comply with existing local kennel licensing requirements.

Importantly, Maryland already maintains a comprehensive local regulatory framework for breeders under **Maryland Local Government §13-108**, making HB 1551 duplicative rather than additive.

Additionally, the bill proposes regulations without foundational data. A core concern is that Maryland's current shelter reporting system does not seem to provide the data necessary to determine what, if any, impacts small responsible breeders are having on the shelters. Unless data breaks down original sourcing and reasons for relinquishing by the owner, such as affordability, loss of housing, or similar reasons, the data does not necessarily point back to responsible breeders. Further, the data is only collected by those entities required to or wishing to seek grants from the statewide spay/neuter program. Without requiring data from all Maryland shelters or requiring rescues to report such data results, policymakers lack evidence necessary for sound policy.

Regulating breeders without first understanding the full dynamics of shelter overcrowding risks targeting the wrong part of the system and imposing economic costs without addressing the true causes of shelter overcrowding. In other words, without sound data, why should responsible breeders be forced to pay for a shelter system without proof of their contributing to the issues faced by shelters? Economically sound policy must be built on data, not assumptions.

Instead of advancing HB 1551 in its current form, AKC strongly recommends that Maryland first implement a statewide shelter and rescue reporting requirement, similar to Illinois Public Act 100-0870. Establishing this foundation would allow the General

Assembly, including this Committee, to adopt evidence-based, cost-effective solutions that target real drivers of animal welfare challenges.

Should the Committee elect to move HB 1551 forward with its current proposed program, we respectfully request at minimum an amendment exempting individuals not required to obtain a local kennel license under §13-108 from the requirements of the bill. However, even this amendment will not resolve the broader structural and economic issues presented in the bill.

The American Kennel Club appreciates both Delegate Metzgar's concern for animal welfare. Even more so, AKC appreciates the Committee's commitment to ensuring legislation is practical, economically sound, and supported by data. HB 1551, as written, does not meet those thresholds. For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to give **HB 1551 an unfavorable report**.

Thank you for your consideration.