

# Testimony in Opposition to HB 1551

## House Economic Matters Committee – Regulation of Dog Breeders

I respectfully submit testimony in opposition to **HB 1551**, which proposes imposing new breeder registration fees and per-litter costs in order to generate funding for animal shelters.

Supporting animal shelters is an important public goal. However, HB 1551 misidentifies the source of shelter intake and places the financial burden on responsible breeders rather than addressing the actual drivers of animal surrender.

I, as do other responsible Maryland breeders, already register and microchip our pups **BEFORE** they go home. We work to ensure our puppies are accurately matched to the lifestyle of their owners, to make as perfect a fit as possible. The puppy contract states, that if, for whatever reason, the match no longer fits, puppies are **ALWAYS** returned to the breeder, and **NOT** sent to a shelter. Additionally, many breed clubs sponsor a rescue network, that is financially supported by its members to ensure our animals do not go into shelters. If by chance one does end up in one, the national/regional/local clubs go into rescue mode at their expense to remove the dog, examine and work with it to ensure it has good manners, is up to date on vaccinations, and only then, find the best family fit **BEFORE** it is rehomed. Because of that conscientiousness and commitment to our breeds, nationally, only 5% of purebred dogs make up the shelter population according to a [2018 study by Arizona State University](#)

## Maryland Shelter Data

According to the **2024 Animal Shelter Statistics Report** from the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland shelters received substantial numbers of animals in the past year:

- **33,252 dogs** entered Maryland shelters
- **45,447 cats** entered Maryland shelters

Of the dog intake:

- **14,571 dogs were classified as strays**
- **8,466 were owner surrenders**
- **3,249 were owner-requested euthanasia cases**
- The remaining intake included transfers and other impounds. ([Maryland.gov Enterprise Agency Template](#))

These numbers demonstrate that **stray animals and owner surrender account for the majority of shelter intake**, not dogs from regulated breeders.

Local shelter reports confirm this trend. In **St. Mary's County**, for example, shelter officials reported that rising **owner surrenders—often tied to financial hardship—were a major driver of increased shelter admissions** in 2025. ([The BayNet](#))

This data indicates that shelter crowding is primarily linked to **economic and social pressures on pet owners**, not the activities of responsible breeders.

## Existing Maryland Programs Already Address Overpopulation

Maryland already operates one of the nation's most successful state-funded spay and neuter initiatives through the Maryland Department of Agriculture Spay and Neuter Grants Program.

Since its launch in 2014:

- More than **119,000 spay and neuter procedures** have been funded statewide.
- Over **\$8.8 million** has been awarded to local organizations.
- Shelter intake has declined slightly while **euthanasia rates have fallen by roughly 50%**. ([Maryland News](#))

Importantly, this program is funded through **pet food manufacturer registration fees**, spreading the cost broadly across the pet industry rather than targeting a single small group.

HB 1551 would shift that balanced funding model by singling out responsible breeders for additional taxation.

## Fiscal and Regulatory Concerns

HB 1551 creates new registration requirements and puppy certificate fees tied to each litter. While these fees may appear modest individually, they can disproportionately affect small, responsible breeders who already absorb significant costs for:

- Veterinary care and genetic testing
- Health guarantees and return contracts
- Compliance with state and local regulations

Maryland's responsible hobby breeders typically produce **very limited numbers of dogs each year**, often within their homes and with extensive oversight.

Increasing the cost of compliance can produce unintended consequences:

- Driving small-scale responsible breeders out of the regulated system
- Reducing transparency and oversight
- Encouraging underground or unlicensed breeding activity

Policies that penalize compliant actors rarely improve enforcement outcomes.

## Evidence-Based Strategies to Reduce Shelter Intake

If the legislature wishes to further reduce shelter populations, research and Maryland's own experience suggest more effective strategies:

- Expanding access to affordable veterinary care and spay/neuter services
- Supporting owner-retention programs for families facing financial hardship
- Increasing enforcement against illegal or unlicensed breeders
- Encouraging pet-friendly housing policies

These approaches address the **actual causes of animal surrender and stray populations** rather than placing financial responsibility on responsible breeders.

## Conclusion

Animal welfare is a shared priority for Maryland communities. However, public policy should be guided by evidence.

State shelter data demonstrates that **stray animals and owner hardship—not responsible breeders—drive the majority of shelter intake**. For this reason, imposing new breeder taxes through **HB 1551** is unlikely to meaningfully reduce shelter populations while potentially discouraging responsible breeding practices.

Additionally, **HB 1551**:

- **Imposes High and Compounding Costs** - the bill mandates a \$150 annual registration fee and \$50 per-puppy birth certificate fees. These costs accumulate quickly and could make responsible breeding financially unsustainable.
- **Creates Privacy and Safety Concerns** - the publicly accessible registry exposes breeders' locations and operational details, increasing risks of theft, harassment, and targeting by bad actors or extremists.
- **Increases the Risk of Driving Breeding Underground** - overly broad and costly regulation may push breeding activity into unregulated or informal markets, reducing transparency and making enforcement more difficult.
- **Provides No Clear Evidence of a Problem** - the bill creates an expansive regulatory system to address a perceived issue of breeders impacting the shelter population, without data showing that responsible Maryland breeders are contributing to shelter intake or welfare issues.

**HB 1551** creates a costly, intrusive, and overly broad framework that harms responsible breeders without producing meaningful animal welfare benefits.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the committee that the bill be held, and that instead they first study the issue to better understand what is contributing to dogs being placed in Maryland shelters, and instead pursue evidence-based policies that address the root causes of shelter intake.

Thank you for your consideration.

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