

Lawmakers' pet project: Target puppy mill abuses

By **Emily S. Achenbaum**
TRIBUNE REPORTER

Animal welfare activists and state Rep. John Fritchey (D-Chicago) met Sunday at PAWS Chicago, a no-kill animal shelter in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood, to announce proposed legislation that would regulate large-scale dog breeders and pet stores with the goal of cracking down on abusive puppy mills.

The bill, sponsored by Fritchey and state Sen. Dan Kotowski (D-Mt. Prospect) and backed by the Humane Society of the United States and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, is called Chloe's Bill after a young female dog that was rescued from a filthy, unlicensed puppy mill in Downstate Macon County.

"This isn't something that should be considered radical," Fritchey said. "It's decent."

Fritchey said opposition to the bill may be inevitable, but that he would have concerns about any dog breeder who opposed the law.

Puppy mills take a factory-like approach to animal breeding: maximum puppy output with minimal cost and care, Fritchey said. He noted that's in contrast to many reliable breeders, who take loving care of animals and only breed a few dogs at a time.

The legislation, if passed in its

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proposed form, would:

- Create a Dog Breeder License Act, which would prevent breeders from having more than 20 unaltered (not neutered or not spayed) dogs.

- Prohibit people from obtaining a dog-breeding license if they have been convicted of a felony animal-cruelty crime, including dog fighting.

- Require dog breeders to keep dogs in buildings without wire flooring and with sufficient heating, cooling and ventilation. Humane Society officials said Sunday that many puppy mills they've uncovered have dogs in crates stacked high on top of each other, with the wire flooring of the crates destroying the animals' paws over time.

- Require pet stores and breeders to provide potential pet buyers with the dog's full medical history, information of spaying and neutering, and information about any prior medical care. Humane Society officials said many dogs from puppy mills end up having substantial medical problems because of inter-

breeding and exposure to disease in cramped breeding environments.

- Establish penalties starting with fines and escalating to having animals seized and breeding operations shut down.

Chloe, the only surviving member of her litter at the puppy mill, is now 6 months old. She attended the news conference wearing a collar with a large bow. Chloe affectionately snuggled into the arms of her adoptive dad, Roy Austin, who heads animal control in Macon County.

The young spaniel, with her giant eyes, floppy ears and a shiny black coat, may have fetched \$200 to \$400 at a pet store in Illinois and \$800 or more if she had been shipped to an upscale pet store in New York state, said Cori Menkin, ASPCA's senior director of legislative initiatives.

Menkin listed the many ailments Chloe suffered from in the puppy mill: The animals were covered with feces and fleas, and they had internal parasites, matted coats and damaged paws from standing 24 hours a day in urine-soaked wire cages.

"We've seen less enforcement by the USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] and state departments of agriculture than we'd like," Menkin said. "This bill will change many of these horrific conditions."

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Chloe, a 6-month-old spaniel, licks Paige Vogelzang, 9, as Chloe's owner, Roy Austin, watches. Chloe was rescued from a puppy mill. **CHUCK BERMAN/TRIBUNE**