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Standing Committee on Justice Policy

Preventing Unethical
Puppy Sales Act, 2024

Selection of estimates

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 8 May 2024

Comité permanent de la justice

Loi de 2024 sur la prévention
de la vente de chiots contraire
à l'éthique

Sélection des budgets
des dépenses

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 8 mai 2024

Chair: Goldie Ghamari
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Présidente : Goldie Ghamari
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
JUSTICE POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT
DE LA JUSTICE**

Wednesday 8 May 2024

Mercredi 8 mai 2024

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2.

**PREVENTING UNETHICAL
PUPPY SALES ACT, 2024**

**LOI DE 2024 SUR LA PRÉVENTION
DE LA VENTE DE CHIOTS CONTRAIRE
À L'ÉTHIQUE**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 159, An Act to amend the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019 / Projet de loi 159, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2019 sur les services provinciaux visant le bien-être des animaux.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy to order. We are meeting today to begin public hearings on Bill 159, An Act to amend the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019. Are there any questions before we begin our public hearings?

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER
AND RESPONSES**

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I will now call upon the sponsor of the bill, the Honourable Michael S. Kerzner, Solicitor General.

Minister, you will have up to 20 minutes for your presentation, followed by 40 minutes of questions from the members of the committee. The questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of five minutes for the independent member of the committee.

Minister, the floor is yours. Please begin.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Good morning. Bonjour à tous. Merci, madame la Présidente du comité.

Rien pour moi, en tant que solliciteur général, n'est plus important que la sécurité de notre province. For me, public safety is very, very important.

We are here today to talk about our government's commitment on animal welfare. We're here today to talk about the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, and I'll just give a quick overview that I think is important.

Why are we here? We're here due to the inferior quality of care of puppies sold by puppy mills, and the numerous health problems and behavioural issues that result from bad actors. That's why our government is cracking down

on puppy mill operations—to help ensure the safe and ethical treatment of dogs. The Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, if passed, will help stop harmful dog breeding practices, impose penalties on bad actors and make sure that dogs across Ontario receive the care they deserve.

With the strongest penalties for animal welfare violations in the country, our government is ensuring a comprehensive and robust animal welfare system to enhance animal safety province-wide. Cruelty to animals cannot be tolerated anywhere in Ontario.

I've said this in the Legislature; I'll say it at committee: If anyone suspects that an animal is in distress or is being abused, please call 1-833-9-ANIMAL.

Again, I want to thank you, Madam Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. I'm delighted to have our deputy Solicitor General for public safety, Mario Di Tommaso, with me as well.

I'm pleased to join you this morning to present on Bill 159. If passed—and I've just said it before—this bill will help crack down on puppy mill operations in this province and improve the health and welfare outcomes for dogs bred here. This bill is a prime example of where this government has listened and is taking concrete action to make changes that will have a positive impact. Through this bill, we're taking a stand against unethical dog breeding practices and the horrific distress and harm that results from them across the province.

Before delving into details, I'd like to emphasize the paramount importance of public safety. Public safety is our government's top priority morning, noon and night. It's important that we understand this. When we think of public safety, we think of our inherent rights—and I've said this many times—of being able to live in our community safely, to wake up our kids and see them off for school, to check on our parents, to go to work, to shop, to come home and play in the park, and to pray. Public safety is multi-dimensional. Animal welfare is part of this umbrella of public safety. Every single day, I'm proud to lead a portfolio that encompasses policing, fire, corrections, probation and parole, and the coroner's office. We're here today to also talk about something I'm honoured to lead as part of the portfolio on public safety, and that's animal welfare.

The government has made public safety one of the most fundamental commitments, which includes ensuring that animals across the province are cared for. Just a few years ago, we passed the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act; ironically, the acronym for this is PAWS. I have to say,

how amazing is this, that we've taken the PAWS Act with such seriousness—and we looked across the aisle in the Legislature, because people from across the aisle have wonderful pets that are additions to their family. I'm looking at people around the room, and I know some of the pets that you have that are part of and an extension to your family. So the government understands that animal welfare is very important.

If passed, these changes that we're talking about today will create more tools to stop harmful practices associated with puppy mills, penalize the bad actors, and make sure that dogs across the province receive the proper care and attention they deserve. I said this in my remarks in the Legislature: This is not about the good actors. This is not about people who are legitimate, caring, concerned and loving to their animals. This is about the bad actors.

I mentioned during second reading the term “puppy mill.” It's a colloquial term. For those who have seen the inside of one or even seen photos, you'll know that this type of operation usually coincides with breeders who overbreed their dogs, neglect their dogs, fail the basic standards of care—fail to even care for the basic standards of care. These facilities often come hand in hand with a lack of sanitary attention, minimal vet care, if any at all.

“Puppy mills,” again, might be a colloquial term, but the effects of these operations are very real. The unfortunate truth is that animals born into puppy mills are often raised, in their early days, without the basic care, leading to decreased welfare. This neglect can result in severe health complications later in their lives. It's time for the individuals profiting from these practices to be held accountable for their mistreatment and unethical conduct. Puppy mill operators are a world apart from responsible dog breeders who really do care about their animals. Responsible dog breeders spend a lot of time and money making sure their dogs are healthy and find good homes, but dogs from puppy mills generally don't get any of that care or any thought as to how they will end up—again, that is the bad actors, the puppy mill operators. Instead, they're kept in small, unsanitary and overcrowded spaces. They might not have enough food or water, and they might be treated badly, and they can end up sick. Many puppy mills don't even have the proper living arrangements to remain comfortable during Ontario's four seasons.

No genuine lover of animals would condone the operation of a puppy mill. Likewise, no dog lover would knowingly support such cruelty by purchasing a puppy from one. But many innocent people, unfortunately, are being misled. They're buying these sick and mistreated dogs. And operators are profiting from their abusive practices, at the expense of Ontarians. That's not right.

Once again, it's critical to highlight the clear differences between a responsible dog breeder—one who treats their dogs and puppies with care and respect—and those who engage in unethical practices. For the purposes of this committee, we're focusing on the bad actors. The bad actors are the irresponsible breeders who are letting animals live in bad conditions. These operations are not good for the animals. For instance, some of these bad actors are using online advertising and sales platforms to sell their puppies.

However, we can say with certainty that we're hearing more about these bad actors. These are the red flags, and we can't afford to ignore them, which is why we're here today.

I believe everyone on this committee can think of a story of their own constituent who might have unknowingly purchased a dog from a puppy mill. With these stories becoming more prevalent, it is now more important than ever that we crack down on the puppy mills.

I want to outline some key components of the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act. Allow me to provide a little bit of background for the committee.

Our government proudly established the first comprehensive, provincially operated animal welfare enforcement system in Canada. The PAWS Act came into force on January 1, 2020. I want to give respect to a person who helped shepherd this to fruition, and that is our great Deputy Premier and current Minister of Health, the Honourable Sylvia Jones. When Sylvia Jones was Solicitor General, she saw that first iteration of the PAWS Act come to life, and I want to recognize her and respect her contribution.

We understood with the PAWS Act that we wanted to implement a revamped enforcement approach, with an expanded team of skilled inspectors dedicated to upholding the PAWS Act; these are, today, our animal welfare inspectors. We wanted to make sure that we could empower them to levy the strongest financial penalties for offenders compared to any other provinces or territories in the country. We updated the prohibitions and obligations, such as making it an offence to harm service animals, police dogs or horses. We believe, and I believe it very much, that we bolstered the public trust by establishing this enhanced oversight of the inspectors, providing greater transparency and accountability, and introducing a streamlined complaint system. But this was just the beginning.

I also want to acknowledge our great Deputy Solicitor General, who was there to see these elements come to life as well.

I want to acknowledge your work, Deputy.

Our dedication to establishing, upholding and enhancing a robust system for animal protection remains unwavering. I'm proud that as Solicitor General, I can continue on the path of my predecessor with the courage to say publicly how important animal welfare is, and we've continued to show just how important it is.

0910

I'll tell you another proof point. Just last June, we passed the Strengthening Safety and Modernizing Justice Act, which included further amendments aimed at enhancing the PAWS Act and making it even more robust. And we're only getting started. These amendments brought clarity to the Animal Care Review Board procedures and empowered animal welfare inspectors to promptly remove animals that are in critical distress. Moreover, those amendments to the act enhanced the recovery of costs associated with caring for distressed animals removed by the animal welfare service inspectors, and provided specific guidelines on the types of expenses eligible for reimbursement.

Under the PAWS Act, owners and custodians of dogs are held accountable for complying with all provisions, including the general prohibition against causing distress.

Now, through this proposed legislation, Ontario is set to become the first jurisdiction in Canada to explicitly include the term “puppy mill” into law. The amendments, if passed, will set out various prohibitions and penalties to directly address puppy mill operators.

I would like to outline some of the changes and paint a picture as to why this is so important that we have to look at legislating it, which is why we’re here. Dog breeding is a very intricate space, but as mentioned, where this bill will take a focus is specifically in the space of puppy mills and, again, bad actors. We can’t stress this enough. This is not about the good actors. This is not about rural Ontario. This is not about urban Ontario. This is not about any one geographic place in Ontario. This is about the bad actors, who must be held to account and who will be held to account.

Right now, breeders, including puppy mills, often operate out of their own homes or backyards or farms. A significant number of puppy mill operations operate discreetly, with a considerable portion of dog sales being conducted through online platforms. As a result, prospective owners may never meet a puppy’s parents or see the conditions in which they’re raised. While this would send out an early warning flag, one would think, to prospective buyers, innocent Ontarians are still being victimized, and that’s not right. Responsible dog breeding comes with a significant cost, and as mentioned earlier, a conscientious breeder prioritizes the well-being of their dogs and provides them with a home and a living space. They do this with pride; bad actors do not.

Responsible breeders further avoid overbreeding and dedicate ample time for rearing for the new mother and her puppies, ensuring they receive proper nourishment and attention during those critical few early stages of life, those first few weeks. When people think of puppy mills, they often think of large-scale operations churning out hundreds of puppies a year in standard breeding operations, but yet that’s not always the case. Smaller-scale breeding operations, sometimes referred to as backyard breeders, may produce fewer dogs; however, these breeding operations can still cause dogs and puppies to suffer, especially when they’re in unsanitary conditions.

As I mentioned, owners or custodians of dogs are subject to all measures under the PAWS Act—and I am proud of that—including the prohibition against causing distress and ensuring that the general standard of care that applies to all animals covered by the PAWS Act is being met. But there’s no prohibition, again, related to what constitutes a puppy mill. The proposed PUPS Act, if passed, will help stop harmful dog breeding practices and impose new minimum financial penalties and make sure that dogs across Ontario receive the care and attention they deserve.

We are aiming to cut off the lifelines that are keeping puppy mills functioning, and imposing fines on these bad actors. And I can tell you something: The puppy mills will not appreciate what we’re doing, and that’s okay.

Breeding and pregnancy and labour and delivery can be strenuous for dogs. Inhumane breeding practices make these challenges even more difficult and debilitating. Female dogs should not be bred too early because they need time to recuperate between the litters.

The changes in the PUPS Act will, if passed, prohibit harmful dog breeding practices common in puppy mills.

Breeding a dog at a too young age is a problem. Dogs must be physically able to breed and care for their litter. Certain health tests are important, giving dogs that extra time to allow breeders to assess their temperament and behaviour, and aiding in better breeding decisions is important. Breeding a female dog too early in its reproductive cycle is a problem, and this is why the industry standards recommend that they wait until the second or third heat cycle before attempting to breed.

This proposed act will prohibit separating a puppy from its mother at too young an age, because we know just how important these first few weeks are between a mom and a pup. They rely entirely on their mother.

Allowing a dog with a contagious disease is another example that can be problematic if they interact with other dogs. Separating dogs with suspected or confirmed contagious diseases is critical to prevent the spread of potentially fatal illnesses. Again, the good actors know that, all over Ontario. The bad actors don’t care, and we have to be reminded of that.

Breeding dogs in unsanitary environments and failing to prevent an accumulation of waste is another problem, another risk posed. Poor sanitation is a problem. The good actors know that. The bad actors don’t care. That’s why we have to put them on notice and put them out of business.

We know, in our province, we will have municipalities that have already enacted bylaws to deter unethical puppy distribution and sales, and that’s important to note.

As an example, in 2011, the city of Toronto, where I’m a proud resident and proud MPP, banned pet stores from selling puppies sourced from puppy mills, knowing full well that these dogs are often subject to health risks.

However, the issue extends beyond individual municipalities, and relying solely on the patchwork of local regulations is not enough. I applaud the municipalities like my city of Toronto that understood this, and they enacted bylaws. This is welcome, but the purpose of why we’re here today is to say that that’s not enough. We have to stop the bad actors in the tracks. That’s why we’re here today. There has to be an absolute, province-wide regulation, which is why the proposed legislation will include new regulatory powers allowing the ministry to establish conditions in future regulations regarding the sale and transfer of dogs, and to implement a record-keeping system and requirement.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Future regulations could, for example, help stop the puppy sales at too early an age.

I just want to say that when we look at what our government is doing, we are consistent in every way. We have prioritized public safety like never before. We have never had a government that cares more about the public safety of all Ontarians than our government, led by Premier Ford—and that includes our seriousness when it comes to animal welfare. That’s why we’re committed to improving Ontario’s animal welfare system, to ensure animals receive the protection they deserve.

Thank you. Merci beaucoup.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): This round of questions will begin with the official opposition. MPP Mamakwa, you may begin.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Chair.

Thank you for your presentation, Minister.

Certainly, governments have come a long way—come a long way in the sense that, a long time ago, in the 1950s, 1960s, governments would come to our reserves, come to our communities and shoot our dogs. So I think when we talk about puppies, I think that you’ve come a long way. We used our dogs as a way of living, a way to travel, because we had no means to travel. So it has come a long way.

I know, in the riding of Kiiwetinoong, certainly—it’s 294,000 square kilometres. I just recently travelled up north, and there’s a term that we have: “rez dogs”—reservation dogs. These are strays that are in our communities. It’s almost like animal control, access to veterinarians is non-existent.

How are you going to enforce these unplanned puppy mills in Kiiwetinoong?

0920

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Madam Chair, to my colleague and friend opposite: He’s right; Ontario is very big. Last year, I travelled up to the member’s riding, to Lac Seul First Nation. I saw for myself there just how large that territory is and how important dogs are to the community, how important animal welfare is to the community. That’s why I’d say to the member that this is about looking at the bad actors, to ensure that people’s way of life throughout Ontario is not called into question.

The member raises another issue, which I think is an important issue, and that is to make sure that everywhere in Ontario, people understand that the PAWS Act, the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, applies to them as well. What we’re talking about in the act is identifying the bad actors, and we’re not looking to affect any community’s way of life at all.

The member also has raised with me the need to ensure that veterinarian care is provided throughout Ontario, and I think that’s why the government is talking with respect to the fact that people who are looking to enter into the profession should also understand that rural and northern Ontario and First Nations communities are a place that they can help make a difference, as well.

We will continue to treat animal welfare very seriously throughout Ontario.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch. You spoke about the puppy mills—you elaborated on the bad actors—and the way they’re run.

How many puppy mills are there in the province?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Chair, I would like the Deputy Solicitor General to reply.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Thank you for the question.

Given the nature of puppy—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Please state your name for the record before you begin.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: I apologize. My name is Mario Di Tommaso. I am the Deputy Solicitor General of community safety.

Thank you for the question.

Given the nature of puppy mills, they are primarily run underground, and they are indeed very, very secretive. They don’t advertise that they are the bad actors, so putting an estimate on the number of unethical puppy mills is very, very difficult.

Having said that, there was a Toronto Star article not too long ago that estimated that the number of puppy mills in Canada was about 2,000, and the vast majority of those were in the province of Ontario and in Quebec. So that’s the best estimate that we have, knowing that there are approximately eight million dogs in Canada. And that stat comes from Statistics Canada.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: My next question is, how many legal dog breeders would there be once the PAWS Act comes into force?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, through you, Madam Chair—and then I’ll ask the deputy to also reply—the issue that we’re talking about today is not the legal dog breeders. The issue that we’re talking about today is the bad actors or the puppy mills. Again, with your permission, I’ll ask the deputy to reply further.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: We don’t have an estimate in terms of the number of ethical puppy breeders versus unethical.

What we are seeking to do is to put these unethical bad actors out of business through prohibiting all sorts of bad procedures. At the end of the day, their main motivation is to make money. They care not about the well-being and the welfare of puppies. That’s what we are seeking to do.

Unfortunately, sir, we don’t have an estimate as to the number of breeders that are out there today.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: When we talk about enforcement of the act, “How will you actually enforce this act?” is another question.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for the question.

We’re going to enforce the act by the act, with the penalties that are there. We’re going to enforce the act by the animal welfare inspectors we have as part of the ministry. We’re going to enforce the act by setting the tone and the standard and the expectation that—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:—Ontarians have by understanding just how important it is that they care for their animals with respect throughout Ontario.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Does that mean that you will be devoting additional resources for the enforcement of the act?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I think what’s important is that as the animal welfare services division of the ministry continues to evolve—because it just started a few years ago—we will continue to utilize the resources we have, the resources that are available from time to time, to enforce the act. The absolute constant in this is our seriousness of treating our animals with the respect and care they deserve.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We’ll turn to the independent member. You may begin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thanks for taking time out of your busy day to come in.

I've got a couple of lead-up questions.

You mentioned in some of your statements this morning that your government is prioritizing public safety.

My question is, how was this particular bill prioritized as one of the main concerns for this government, bringing this forward?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my colleague and friend who asked the question.

I think it goes back to my predecessor, Minister Sylvia Jones, who was successful in bringing the PAWS Act to life. When we look at the iterations and evolution of animal welfare throughout Ontario, we're looking at it with the lens of listening to our stakeholders, and our stakeholders have long said that the puppy mill bad actors—the puppy mills who are bad actors—are a problem. As a result, in listening to them, we came forward with the act that we're here today to talk about, and I think that's important. It's because our government listened.

Mr. Michael Mantha: This committee is going to be entrusted with a variety of bills that we're going to be discussing going forward—none of them are to be lesser as far as a priority going forward. I guess my question to the minister—and again, we're dealing with Bill 159 now. This committee is going to be entrusted with dealing with a major priority and concern with Bill 173 in a month to come over the foreseeable future. How would any of the other bills that are entrusted with this committee—how does that become a priority for your ministry?

I'll just give you an example. How does Bill 74, the Missing Persons Amendment Act, become a priority for public safety with the ministry and become an issue that the government wants to bring forward and deal with at the ministry level? How do we make that decision?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: To my colleague: The government's commitment to public safety has been absolute and constant. It has been reflected by just what we've done in the last year, by how we've strengthened our public safety; the announcements that we've made, which include getting the violent and repeat offenders off our streets by having an unprecedented \$112-million grant; by dealing, especially in southern Ontario, where it's very prevalent, with auto thefts that are taking place every couple of minutes—we put in a \$51-million investment. I would also add graduating a record number of cadets at the Ontario Police College, by removing the barriers to entry.

The priorities of public safety are multi-faceted. Animal welfare is part of that priority.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I don't want to linger on this too long, Minister, but I would probably enjoy having conversations with you afterwards in regard to a particular group who feel like they're just not being heard by this government. I do hear you when you're saying that this government is listening to stakeholders, but particularly the Ontario Autism Coalition feel like they're not being heard—

Mr. Graham McGregor: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes?

Mr. Graham McGregor: The purpose of the committee today is to talk about Bill 159. It's a very serious topic. This is a big deal—cracking down on illegal puppy mills.

I know some of the members are laughing about it, but it is a very big, serious issue. So, pursuant to standing order 59(b), I would ask the Chair to direct the member to direct his questions to the bill that we are debating here today.

0930

Mr. Michael Mantha: I got the eyes from the Chair, so I hear that, and I think I introduced that question—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): You have one minute left.

Mr. Michael Mantha: —indicating that I was going there.

Anyway, I would enjoy having that conversation with you.

I just want to go back. As I said, in addition to resources, as the member from the official opposition mentioned, would there be additional funding that would be put towards the enforcement of this particular piece of legislation; that would be provided to government ministries, individuals, municipalities and so on, to go along with accompanying the enforcement of this legislation?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: When Minister Sylvia Jones saw the law enacted and proclaimed, the ministry built out an animal welfare team of inspectors. And I just want to say—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time that we have.

We'll turn to the government. MPP Coe, you may begin.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Minister, thank you for being here. Deputy Minister, thank you for being here as well, as well as the supporting staff who are here, who worked hard in developing this legislation.

In the region of Durham, Minister, we have eight municipalities, and many of those municipalities have animal services departments.

I'd like you to speak for a moment, please, about what level of municipal involvement you anticipate in terms of regulating dog breeding practices.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I think, as I said in my remarks, municipalities have a role to play. The city of Toronto understood this some 13 years ago.

The reason that we're here—to my colleague and friend from Whitby—is that we need to have an overarching, centralized approach piece of legislation that is the umbrella to animal welfare.

I think the municipalities absolutely have a role to play. They absolutely have shown that when they've enacted bylaws, it has been very helpful. I would encourage them to continue to do that, because it is their residents who walk their dogs on the streets and play in the parks; it's their residents who reap the benefit of having their animals, by extension to their family, as their pets.

The municipalities have a role to play, but we can't be dependent exclusively on them.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you for that response.

Chair, through you: MPP McGregor, please.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP McGregor.

Mr. Graham McGregor: I want to commend you for bringing this bill forward. I think this is a critical bill in our pursuit of justice for all animals across Ontario.

We have other members of our caucus who I know have been integral on the animal welfare file, and this bill particularly—Ms. Dixon—but I also want to give a big shout-out to the former parliamentary assistant, Christine Hogarth, for her work on the PUPS bill. It's an act that is put together with good intentions, and when you read through the act, that really comes across.

I want to ask a little bit about some of the provisions around record-keeping. We know that there are penalties that are being brought in to hold the bad actors accountable, and I think people can easily understand that. But a part of the bill people might not fully understand the importance of is why we are enforcing record-keeping for dog breeders to make sure that they're being ethical.

Can you outline a little bit the methodology of why having standards on record-keeping is important and why that's a crucial part of the bill that members of this committee should be considering?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I also want to acknowledge the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore and the member from Sarnia–Lambton, who were the parliamentary assistants to the Solicitor General, because they had a very important role in making sure that the iterations of animal welfare have reached this day.

It's very simple: Record-keeping is very important. When we look at the sick puppies that often lack the veterinarian documentation, vaccinations and microchipping, it's very important that there be proper records that are kept. It's actually giving people that reassurance that that exists. It's important to know, similarly, that the bad actors are identified so that people who are innocent to adopt an animal do not become prey unknowingly.

Mr. Graham McGregor: I appreciate that.

I yield my time to Mr. Riddell.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Thank you.

I'd like to applaud you on this coming bill, and I think it's a great step forward.

My personal experience with this has been a little traumatic. I had a dog pass. I've always had Australian shepherds. I went online and purchased a dog, not knowing it was from a puppy mill. I went and visited the location, and the dog was in distress and in horrible conditions. I bought the dog just to get the dog out of that situation.

My question is, can we seize the assets of these puppy mills that are not in compliance, as proceeds of a crime?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Madam Chair, and to my friend from Cambridge: That's a question for the Ministry of the Attorney General.

I happened to go out to the member's riding—actually, he was there, the member from Brantford–Brant. We saw our animal welfare inspectors in training, the then newest class. What really impressed me is the robust education that they're getting to make sure that they can make the best decisions possible. They have rescued, since our Deputy Premier saw the legislation through enactment and proclamation, thousands and thousands of animals.

I think of the case from the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, who had a constituent in her com-

munity, where the animal was rescued by the animal welfare inspectors—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I think what we need to understand is that the training the animal welfare inspectors get is so important, that allows them to take care of the animals or take them out of a harmful environment.

Mr. Brian Riddell: When do you think these new rules will come into effect?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, again, we want to see Bill 159 pass, as a commitment by our government to strengthen animal welfare, and we look forward to having that happen as soon as reasonably possible.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the official opposition. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister, for your presentations and answers so far.

I'm really quite gripped with your initial response to my colleague's question about the number of puppy mills in Ontario. Because you couldn't answer the question, Minister, I'm just curious: Given the fact that PAWS has been operating since 2019—and prior to that, we had the OSPCA. They have, over the years, investigated complaints and laid charges.

Haven't there been any records kept so far about, on average, the estimated number of puppy mills in Ontario? You must have a sense.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I believe the Deputy Solicitor General did say that. There are over 2,000 puppy mills that we believe exist throughout the country, with a predominant portion here in Ontario.

To the member's specific question—and I've said this in the Legislature: Almost 800 charges have been laid since the PAWS Act came into force; over 10,000 orders issued; approximately 8,000 animals removed from situations by the animal welfare inspectors. The numbers speak loud. The numbers are quite large in terms of what has actually happened since the PAWS Act came into fruition.

0940

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Just to clarify: The number of charges laid by the OSPCA has now significantly out-ranked that of PAWS, despite the fact that they've got over \$15 million more today than they had prior. So can the minister explain to the committee why it is that PAWS has more money—over \$15 million more today—than what PAWS had back in 2019, and yet we've seen the number of orders issued and charges laid drop significantly?

I just want to put this on the record: The number of orders issued by the OSPCA was 16,148 over the period of 2020–23. And then compare that to what PAWS is up to these days—we're seeing orders issued down to 1,946. Comparatively, we're seeing orders issued by OSPCA originally sitting at 6,970, and now it's down to an alarmingly low number of 667. Can the minister explain the discrepancy?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Chair, I'll ask the Deputy Solicitor General to reply.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Thank you for the question.

I'm not sure about the staffing level of the OSPCA before 2020. But I can tell you that the PAWS, the animal

welfare service, is a net new agency, and our focus is relieving animals that are in critical distress. I'm very proud of the number of animals that have actually been seized and removed from those situations.

We have brought those animals before the Animal Care Review Board to make sure that they are properly cared for, and we charge back. We have the ability to charge the owners for the cost of caring for those animals in an ethical way. That's what I'm really proud of.

I don't know what the stats are with the OSPCA, in terms of the number of volunteers they had or the number of paid staff.

But animal welfare services is a net new organization. We are continuing to grow, we are continuing to learn, and we continue to focus on animal welfare.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Just to unpack what you've just described—and my question is back to the Solicitor General—if an organization receives significantly more money, one would anticipate that the outcome would be better and that would ensure us seeing more orders issued, more charges laid, more prosecution through the courts.

Why are we not seeing more outcome from PAWS? This organization is no longer new. They've now been around for almost five years, since they were created in 2019. Why are we not seeing the results?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, I would say that when we look at the seriousness to which the government has set an overarching policy of animal welfare—a serious tone, a serious message, a serious expectation—to couple on what the Deputy Solicitor General just said, I think we've come a long way in four years. I think we've done a very good job. I think we brought together some committed people under a new umbrella called “animal welfare service inspectors,” who have their charge orders to go through Ontario, with a provincial standard, with a provincial piece of legislation, and take this to a level that is welcomed throughout the province:

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Because we're talking about covering the province—I heard the Solicitor General mention in his previous response that the coverage would also extend to the reserves. Therefore, the enforcement, the inspection, is going to happen on Indigenous reserves. Can you just confirm for us what that would look like? Can you give us a detailed response?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Chair, we're proud that our animal welfare service inspectors go throughout Ontario. I've met them in Sault Ste. Marie.

I'll ask the Deputy Solicitor General to comment further.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Thank you for the question.

The PAWS Act does apply to First Nations territory, with the exception in the case of any conflict within federal law or any Indian Act law made by a First Nation. Animal welfare services has, in the past, certainly partnered with some First Nations to undertake animal welfare inspections within the community, and we continue to be there for First Nations—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: —when they make a request to support their enforcement. So we are there. We have partnered with First Nations in the past.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Can the Solicitor General give us a sense of the response time when a complaint is filed? How long does it take for an inspector to go out to an urban centre and that of an Indigenous reserve?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, I think it's important—and we have seen from your colleague from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, as an example—

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Sorry, Solicitor General; we're going to run out of time. I just want to know how long it will take. Is it one day? Is it four days? Is it four weeks?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: The animal welfare inspectors will attend on a priority basis throughout Ontario as quick as is reasonably possible.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Is there a standard response time?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Again, I'm really—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): That's all the time we have.

We'll now turn to the independent member. You may begin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Minister, I want to go back to where we ended off in our last series of questions: the additional resources.

Are there any additional resources that will be made to the animal welfare inspectors with these new regulations that are going to be coming in, in order for them to complete their tasks?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Chair, through you to the member: We are continuing to build out our animal welfare services division as part of the Ministry of the Solicitor General. With each incremental step we have taken, we have put resources behind it to continue to match the additional responsibilities. Today we have a cadre of very professional, well-trained individuals who are our animal welfare inspectors.

If Bill 159, the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, gets passed, we will continue to make sure that our animal welfare inspectors have the training they need, in compliance with the act.

Mr. Michael Mantha: The additional training is great, but can you be a little bit more specific as to what those resources are going to look like for them to complete these additional tasks that are going to be expected of them, so that we could have greater oversight on puppy mills?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, I think it goes exactly to my remarks, to the tone that we've set—that we want to make sure that we identify the bad actors.

Again, the animal welfare inspectors will have the necessary training that they require to ensure that they help ensure that the act is complied with.

We started, four years ago, with zero animal welfare inspectors before the act came into effect almost five years ago. We continue to make progress. We continue to grow, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Is there a limit, where the bill limits the number of dogs that can be bred at one time? Why weren't there any limits on that particular portion? That's not in this legislation. Is there a reason why that was left out?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Again, I mentioned this in my remarks. As our stakeholders educated us, as other experts in the field educated us—breeding a dog when they're less than 12 months is a problem. That's why we wanted to set not only a minimum age for breeding, but the amount of time a dog can be bred, as well, which itself could be very harmful.

To the member from Algoma–Manitoulin: We have to acknowledge that this Bill 159 is such a great further step and commitment of our government's seriousness on animal welfare.

Mr. Michael Mantha: But if we don't legislate limits, won't this still lead to overcrowding and poor practices? And if we don't provide the additional resources that our animal welfare inspectors are going to need, we're setting ourselves up to fail.

I'm just looking at you, Minister. Are there certain things, thresholds that we could have put in place in order to have greater controls, but we're not doing that?

0950

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll just say again to the member opposite that it's in Bill 159. Breeding female dogs more than three times a year in a two-year period, or breeding more than two litters from a female dog's—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:—consecutive heat cycle—there are prohibitions at the puppy mills contained right in the act.

I think this is an excellent example of how we worked with our stakeholders, we brought it to this day and, most importantly, we have placed Ontario on a trajectory of success when it comes to animal welfare, from where we started with my predecessor, Minister Jones, to where we are today. It is our road map of seriousness of animal welfare.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Bouma, you may begin.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you very much for joining us today, Minister and Deputy Minister.

In my life, I like to try to simplify things just to try to get to the gist of things. I've actually received a lot of emails regarding this legislation in my constituency office—some people with concerns, and some people very excited about the work that we're doing. So I was wondering if I could ask you—through you, Chair, to the deputy minister—to simplify things for whoever may be watching at home and for members of the committee.

You obviously have cases now that have been going through the system. Today, if there was a puppy mill in operation, how would it be reported? How would that work its way through the system? What are the issues with how that would work its way through the system? And what will Bill 159 do, if it's passed, to improve that situation? Could you just walk through that case study and what improvements will be made and how the system will work better for the protection of the animals in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll ask the Deputy Solicitor General to reply.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Thank you for your question.

We would receive a complaint a number of ways. We could potentially receive a complaint of a puppy mill through the public, by calling the animal welfare hotline, the 1-800 number. We could receive a complaint through formal correspondence—through email, through a letter—or through our law enforcement partners. Once that complaint is received, we would certainly investigate the nature of that complaint, and we would send out an inspector to inspect the way in which that puppy was raised.

One of the concerns that we have with these bad actors is that there are insufficient records being kept. So we don't know what the date of birth of the dog is. We don't know who the mom and dad of the parent dog is. We don't know whether or not that dog has had any access to any veterinary care. We don't know if there are any issues with genetic defects at all. These are all very, very serious concerns. So we would seek to investigate the way in which this dog, this puppy, was raised, because it does have an impact on the public. The public, when they buy a dog that is not as healthy as it ought to be and does not survive as long as it needs to be—it has both an emotional impact and a financial impact on members of the public, and that needs to be addressed. What the inspectors would do is seek to investigate the way in which this puppy was raised, in what environment.

The prohibitions that are contained in this act would certainly go a long way in giving the inspectors the enforcement and compliance tools that they need to rectify the situation. This act, if brought into force, if passed, would give those inspectors the authority to investigate and to make reasonable inquiries. It puts the onus on the operators to provide information to the inspector about the way in which these puppies are raised. Based on that investigation, charges could be laid. At the end of the day, the minimum penalty for an unethical puppy mill or for violating the act is \$10,000. That goes to hurt the individual right in the pocketbook, because that's what they're concerned about. They're not concerned about the well-being of the dog. They're not concerned about the public. They're concerned about money. If the puppy mill raises a puppy and the dog passes away, that minimum sentence is \$25,000.

At the end of the day, we're not seeking to punish the ethical and the good breeders. We don't want to put an administrative burden on them. But we do need records to be kept so that the enforcement officers, the inspectors, have the tools they need to identify the bad actors. That will certainly go into our data bank, as well, and we'll have better records and better stats to identify the scope and scale of the problem here in Ontario.

Mr. Will Bouma: Currently, there's no necessity for someone who is breeding dogs to actually keep those records regarding immunizations, date of birth, everything else—and now they would; and if someone does not, charges could be laid, up to \$10,000 per incident, per animal?

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: That's correct. Each incident could be treated as a separate offence.

There will be a necessity, if passed, to keep those records. Those records are going to be a vital tool for the inspectors in order to lay charges and gather the necessary evidence to prosecute, as well.

Mr. Will Bouma: Does this legislation, then, as proposed—as opposed to going through a lengthy court process, this could just be fines that are levied? So if charges are filed, it's just like you get a bill for X? Obviously, that would have quite the impact on someone like that. That sounds like quite an improvement.

We've heard we can't seize assets—that's a question for the Attorney General—but we can make life very uncomfortable for people who aren't following the rules.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Chair, I would just add to my friend and colleague from Brantford—Brant, that under the new legislation, these minimum penalties of \$10,000, as the deputy said, for bad actors operating a puppy mill, and \$25,000—I want to stress this: \$25,000 if the violations result in the death of a dog. This is very important. This will also act as a deterrent, to send a message that there are consequences. As we know from the PAWS Act, when charges are laid and there's failure to comply and then it winds up within the judicial system, this is serious. The minimum penalties is another example of the seriousness to which we place the importance of animal welfare.

Mr. Will Bouma: So if there was a facility with 10 dogs and none of the records were maintained, I'm assuming that the inspector—probably; things happen. If it seemed serious enough, the facility could be charged—10 dogs, \$10,000 per dog. That sounds like quite an improvement, if that's the case.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Again, it goes to the tone of the minimum penalties. I think what Bill 159 does—again, it's the legislation that sends a message that we will not tolerate bad actors. We will not tolerate people who are cruel to our animals. We will not let them get away with it. That's exactly why we've set a very serious tone. I'll say to my friend from Brantford—Brant, it's consistent with how we view public safety. We've set this tone province-wide on policing, on firefighting—there is a tone and expectation, and that's how we're able to live safely in our communities.

Mr. Will Bouma: Sorry for taking so much time.

That sounds like a step in the right direction. Thank you, gentlemen.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): There are only 10 seconds left.

Mr. Will Bouma: Sorry, colleagues.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. This concludes our time.

I'd like to thank you, Minister, for your time.

The committee will now recess until 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1001 to 1300.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Good afternoon, members. The committee will resume public hearings on Bill 159, An Act to amend the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019.

The remainder of our presenters today have been scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour time slot. Each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we have heard from all three presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from mem-

bers of the committee. The time for questions will be broken down into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition, and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent member.

CITY OF BRAMPTON
ANIMAL JUSTICE CANADA
ANIMAL SHELTER PROFESSIONALS
OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I will now call on the city of Brampton. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Mr. Mike Mulick: My name is Mike Mulick. I am the manager of animal services for the city of Brampton. I'm here today to speak about the need to address unethical breeding practices in our province and the lack of protections that are currently available to dogs and puppies that find themselves used by people to make a quick profit.

While the overpopulation of unowned dogs has always been a strain on municipal shelters, the recent increases in cost of living, interest rates and pet care have resulted in fewer residents taking on the responsibility of a new dog. While this has resulted in declining adoption rates for shelters, dog breeders are also experiencing this impact.

While the vast majority of professional breeders ensure that their animals are cared for no matter the circumstances, we're crossing a threshold where unethical breeders are now abandoning new moms and their pups outside at an increasing rate, leaving them to die once they are no longer of value to them.

To date this year within the city of Brampton, we've responded to two such cases. While my staff have rescued many abandoned puppies before it was too late, they've also had to recover deceased dogs that, in the days prior, were posted on classified ads. One only has to look at these classified sites to see puppy mill or backyard breeders reducing their prices from \$1,300 to \$800 to \$300, indicating that they need these dogs gone as soon as possible. Unfortunately, it's usually just a matter of time before these dogs end up on our streets.

This legislation will set standards to make unethical breeders think twice before contributing to the already extensive unowned dog population, and offer enhanced protection for dogs in our community.

Limits on when and the number of times a dog can be bred; preventing siblings from breeding; and providing a minimum age before separating pups from their mom are all necessary and long outstanding, but that's only just the beginning. The only way to change behaviours is to ensure that resources are available to investigate unethical breeding and hold people accountable.

I want to assure you that this legislation is needed and passing it will move the province closer to being a place where vulnerable animals are treated with respect and compassion.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you.

We'll now go to our next presenter, Animal Justice Canada. Please state your name for the record, and you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Ms. Camille Labchuk: I'm Camille Labchuk. I'm a lawyer and the executive director of Animal Justice. We're a national animal law advocacy organization focused on working to improve animal protection laws as well as their enforcement.

Unfortunately, Canada, including Ontario, has some of the worst animal protection laws in the Western world, including when it comes to protecting dogs from puppy mills and backyard breeders. We commend the government for recognizing that this is a significant problem, and the need to tackle dog breeding, but I have significant concerns about this bill. In my view as a lawyer, the PUPS Act won't do much, if anything, to crack down on puppy mills or backyard breeders, and it is mostly unenforceable.

Today, I'll touch on the problems with dog breeding run amok in Ontario, why the bill as drafted doesn't go far enough, and what meaningful action actually would look like. I will elaborate on these points in Animal Justice's written submissions, given the time constraints.

To set the scene, bad breeding, I think we all agree, is a huge problem. These can be massive, six-figure cash-based operations that don't pay taxes, or they can be small mom-and-pop operations in someone's backyard, with poor conditions. But the fact is that Ontario is the Wild West for dog breeding right now because anyone can breed dogs for profit with absolutely zero oversight from the province. If this bill passes unamended, that won't change.

Early in the pandemic, we all understand now that demand for puppies skyrocketed, and a lot of people made some very easy cash by breeding dogs and selling them online to unsuspecting members of the public, often via platforms like Kijiji, where oversight is non-existent and there's no screening for the right home.

This unregulated breeding leads to two problems. The first we're talking about today: terrible conditions in breeding facilities. The second is that it leads to more dogs than people actually need and the so-called market can support.

I think we all read the news stories about dog abandonment in Rouge Park the winter before last.

Breeders are dumping dogs, as well, when they no longer need them.

CTV Kitchener reported last December that Hillside Kennels Animal Control was full after two adult males and 10 shepherd cross puppies were dumped by a puppy mill or backyard breeder in their catchment area, putting the shelter in a position where it was forced to make tough decisions about euthanasia.

Rescues, humane societies and shelters are the ones that pay the price, while breeders are the ones that are raking in massive profits.

We believe it's time to get this unregulated breeding problem under control. But as drafted, the PUPS Act doesn't address this issue.

I'm going to talk about what the PUPS Act actually does. I'm going to cover three issues: The first is the insufficient definition of a puppy mill; the second is the need

for standards of care for dogs used by breeders; and the third is the inability to enforce laws against breeders due to the current lack of licensing.

The PUPS Act definition of a puppy mill is quite sparse, and it leaves out a lot. It restricts the frequency of breeding female dogs to three times in two years—it could go farther, but that's a good start—bans breeding female dogs under one year, bans inbreeding, and requires quarantining sick dogs and keeping dogs in sanitary conditions. These are all generally positive, but this really just scratches the surface of the poor conditions that dogs in puppy mills endure. Notably, the definition doesn't include any restrictions on the size of an operation, which is a major factor impacting dogs and their well-being. It doesn't require veterinary care, vaccinations, socialization, exercise, or set clear standards for housing. This means that a person could still warehouse 100 breeding dogs, plus their puppies, in a windowless factory dog farm, keep them in tiny wire cages 24/7, fail to give them meaningful exercise, allow their fur to become matted, sell the puppies without vaccinations, and this operation would still not be a puppy mill in the eyes of the bill.

I appreciate that the bill does allow government regulations to come in the future, but there's no clear rationale, in my view, for including some restrictions under the act while waiting for others to come via regulation. This allows for uncertainty. I know that we're still awaiting quite a few promised animal welfare regulations under the PAWS Act that have yet to materialize. So I urge the government to start consulting very quickly on regulations if that is in the cards.

The biggest structural problem is that the few protections the PUPS Act does allow for—and including any future standards of care that might come by regulation—are not enforceable. The province and animal welfare services, the enforcement agency, just currently don't have any information about who is breeding dogs and where those facilities are operating. They must rely on tips from the public to find puppy mills, and those tips are very uncommon because puppy mills tend to operate inside barns or people's basements or outbuildings; they're not in places that the public can see and report on. That's why they're so difficult to detect, and that's why only a licensing regime can solve this problem, with enforcement. By requiring that breeders be licensed, animal welfare services would be aware of where they're located and could carry out proactive inspections to determine compliance with any regulations.

I can't build a patio in my backyard without a permit. You need a licence to be a hairstylist in this province. You should need a licence to breed dogs, as well.

A licensing regime would also give authorities a quick way to shut down a problematic breeder rather than laying charges, going through the court process, getting a conviction and hoping the judge is going to impose a prohibition order on future ownership.

Moreover, the government should require that any person who sells a dog must display their licence at the physical location or in an online ad. We don't have time to get into

online ads today, unfortunately, but that's a huge area that needs addressing as well.

The costs of overseeing a licensing regime, of course, should be borne by fees from breeders and not by the public purse.

I should note, on enforcement, that enforcement by animal welfare services is currently problematic and quite non-transparent. The agency doesn't have a website, it doesn't release news releases about its enforcement activities, and it's not actually known—at least, I don't know—if it has ever busted a single puppy mill. The service has four times the budget of the former OSPCA, yet it has issued only a third of the remedial orders and charges that the OSPCA did. So we potentially have an underactive enforcement agency. The ministry should conduct a full audit to determine the extent of this problem. I think that's a really critical part of any legislative or enforcement effort to tackle puppy mills.

To wrap up, I want to thank the government for its interest in protecting dogs. It's a big step, but we urge you to strengthen the PUPS Act to ensure it's actually meaningful and not just window dressing. The recommendations that we submit are to amend this bill to require licensing for commercial dog breeding with appropriate fees and conditions, an inspection before a licence can actually issue, and the licence number to be posted and shared during any sales transactions. Prioritizing transparency is important—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time we have.

We'll now turn to our final presenter, Animal Shelter Professionals of Ontario. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Ms. Lindsey Narraway: My name is Lindsey Narraway. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for inviting me to speak at committee today. I'm the supervisor of animal services for the city of Pickering—as well as having the honour of being the chair of Animal Shelter Professionals of Ontario. So although I'm here today speaking on behalf of our organization, the same sentiments are echoed for us at that municipal level.

As you may not be aware, the Animal Shelter Professionals of Ontario was rebranded last year, so you might know us by the name of AASAO, or the Association of Animal Shelter Administrators of Ontario. We are the same organization. We're an organization of professionals who work in animal shelters from all across Ontario. We're on the front lines of animal welfare in the province, and that includes addressing the results of irresponsible or unethical dog breeding. Our organization is made up of over 100 members, ranging from leaders to staff from humane societies, SPCAs, municipalities, as well as private contractors, and we're from all across Ontario. Our organization has been the voice of animal sheltering organizations from communities large and small since 1981. So we are there; we see what is going on all across Ontario.

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More and more, our animal shelters are seeing owners who breed dogs for profit—just as everyone else who talked

has already been mentioning a little bit—but then they find that they're unable to sell their puppies, and they come to our shelters, they come to our members looking to surrender them as they get older, because now they're less profitable and their expenses rise.

As such, we as an organization completely support the goal of the proposed Bill 159, the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, to stop unethical dog breeding. We believe this is a step forward. The proposed bill speaks to how a puppy mill is defined in great detail, and we're very pleased with how some of the wording is written out.

However, in our area, we are all still struggling with that lack of accountability that surrounds how these unethical breeders are advertising their puppies, and so, long-term, we would like to see some changes to consider and to ensure that consumer safety—that often happens with these problematic breeders. That is an area that's not currently mentioned in the bill, and we feel that through education or through some changes in some regulations, that could really benefit all of us in the field.

We also recognize that the bill doesn't currently emphasize the importance of how we're housing our animals, the importance of socialization and enrichment, but we also recognize that these areas have the ability to be addressed in other sections of the provincial animal services act. So we hope that in future regulations and how they are developed, we'll be able to continue to address those major areas of breeding and of caring for animals—and dogs, specifically.

As with most other legislation, the effectiveness of the act relies heavily on how quickly the regulations are considered and then approved and are able to be used. To ensure the full potential of our legislation is reached, we are hoping that the final version of this bill includes a deadline to develop the regulations.

As I've already mentioned, much of the strength of this act is in the regulations, but those regulations only have value once we're able to have those regulations passed. The Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act was passed in late 2019 and, to date, there still are some regulations that have not been passed under a few of those areas that are very high-priority. So, as an organization, we really feel that we need to have a deadline set and in place to make sure that these regulations are actually enacted and our inspectors have the ability to enforce this bill.

We recognize that the process of regulations is going to involve stakeholder consultations and that it could be a little lengthy. We are happy, as an organization, to continue to work with the province as we move forward with this bill and any other bill that affects the animals in Ontario.

In closing, on behalf of the Animal Shelter Professionals of Ontario, we're very pleased with the proposed bill, and we look forward to its final reading and its passing.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): This round will begin with the independent member, for four and a half minutes. You may begin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'd like to go to Lindsey.

This morning, while we had the minister here, I talked to him about the lack of legislation that would limit the

number of dogs that would be bred at one time, and that we would possibly be seeing this continuing, with the overcrowding and the poor practices as far as puppy mills and so on.

You touched on something that I didn't get a chance to touch on this morning: the living standards in these mills.

What would you like to see in this legislation that would really be a standard introduced—that there are proper living standards for the breeding that is going to be going on?

Ms. Lindsey Narraway: If you're able to put into the act areas where they're talking about the amount of time that dogs need to see outside, caging—they need to be able to get up, they need to walk around, they need to be able to lie down and feel comfortable.

One of the other areas is socialization. By going outside, by having that interaction with people—that is also an area that I think would be very good, as well as that enrichment. So, what types of things—lights being on within the day, music. Adding things that actually just use the words “socializing” and “enrichment”—and then you can define those a little bit later on if you choose to go as far. The animal welfare committee is very well versed as to what those types of things mean for the dogs.

What we're looking at is that the dogs aren't just sitting in a cage 24 hours a day, waiting to go to its next place. We're looking to really be able to embrace that and allow these dogs to have a good life before they get adopted into their families.

Mr. Michael Mantha: In addition to that, having those standards put into place—in your comments, you raised that there is a lack of accountability, and consumers would like to see these standards in there, because they want to be reassured in regard to the potential addition to their family. Having those standards put in place and making sure the consumer knows what they're purchasing would go towards, again, the need for those standards to be put in place or to have them at a certain criteria. It would take away from the overbreeding and the abuses that we're seeing within the industry.

Ms. Lindsey Narraway: I know in part of the act it does talk about the record-keeping and that aspect of it, but, yes, a huge component that we see as well is that accountability.

The general public, when they're going out—they are, unfortunately, looking on Facebook, they're looking on Kijiji trying to find these breeders, and they assume that the breeders that they're going to are ethical.

So having that accountability and having some way to make sure that the ethical breeders are doing everything properly—and that we know that if you are adopting a dog or you are buying a dog, there are standards that need to be followed.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you.

I will concede my time to the next party.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Dixon.

Ms. Jess Dixon: I'll begin with Camille. I know that you and I have actually discussed this off-line. You touched on something really interesting about online ads, Kijiji, craigslist, that type of thing. Can you go a little bit more

into how that plays into the unethical puppy sales side of things and what you think we could do?

Ms. Camille Labchuk: This is one of the main ways that bad operators—backyard breeders, puppy mills—distribute dogs. They are placing ads on Kijiji and other websites, and people are—I've heard so many stories of folks who should know better, who see an ad and think, “Well, this seems nice.” Sometimes the ad uses words like “rescue” and makes it sound like it's not really a puppy mill. People show up, they see dogs in terrible conditions, and they feel so upset by those conditions that they buy them on the spot just to get them out of there. We've all heard stories like this—and some of us who have been in those situations personally. So it's essential, I think, to tackling this puppy mill problem—shutting off that pipeline for them in terms of making those sales. How this is done is a bigger question.

There are obvious implications to regulating online sales. It's not easy to do. I think it would require significant consultation. I do think in the context of there being a licensing regime, this would become a lot easier to tackle, because if each breeder had to have a licence and they had to display that licence number when they are offering dogs for sale, then at least the government would have some way of knowing who's selling dogs on Kijiji and where those dogs are coming from, and inspecting conditions and seeing how many are going out and so on. And the public hopefully would be able to be in a position where they could look up a licence number online and get a sense of the background of that person, as well.

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I think there are a lot of different options. Definitely, there need to be restrictions. I'm not sure about a full-on ban on online sales, because that poses difficulties. But there are a lot of ways that it could be done.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Theoretically, we could even have something where—again, without licensing, but having a CKC registered breeder be permitted to advertise on their own hosted website, but not on Kijiji or craigslist or auction pages, that type of thing?

Ms. Camille Labchuk: That would be a step, as well. I think when you have a central place like Kijiji or other online marketplaces, it becomes really easy for people just to scroll through and pick whatever puppy mill dog they want. If someone is encouraged to do more research and is encouraged to explore adopting dogs from shelters and that process is facilitated, I think you'll see fewer types of those sales from bad breeders and puppy mills.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Yes. Do you have any sense from your expertise and what you've heard about how, even under the current distress provisions, prosecutions are going? Are they happening? How are they working for municipal prosecutors?

Ms. Camille Labchuk: I wish I had more information, but that's just not something that the public really has access to. I would be very doubtful if there were many prosecutions ongoing for bad dog-breeding situations, just because of the difficulty I was speaking about earlier of detecting who these bad operators are.

I would think, as well, that there would be some capacity to use existing laws to prosecute people who keep dogs in terrible conditions. We do have standards of care, under the PAWS Act, that apply to animals, generally speaking, and I think those could be used to prosecute people who keep dogs in filthy conditions with matted fur and that don't get exercise or can't socialize. But I recognize that there are some challenges there.

If an inspector shows up and does get access because they heard some tip—this magical situation where they do see inside a puppy mill—I think that proving a lack of adequate exercise, proving a lot of the circumstances around how those dogs are being kept based on that one glimpse is going to be quite challenging. So I would anticipate that municipal prosecutors would have a great degree of difficulty prosecuting under existing laws.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Okay.

Just briefly to Lindsey—similar question. As somebody who obviously sees a lot of consequences of people buying puppy mill dogs and then ending up essentially dumping them, what do you think about the merits of some sort of awareness campaign with PUPS? I know CKC and other shelters have tried to do it, but it really doesn't seem to be penetrating to a large amount of the population—what you actually need to look for when you're buying a dog.

Ms. Lindsey Narraway: Yes, 100%. You can't just pass the bill and have these acts without following up with that education campaign. It needs to be one that happens throughout the entire year. Lots of times, what we do is that we have something right as we launch things, we start talking about it and everybody hears it, and then, all of a sudden, some other news comes and it's out of sight, out of mind. So, 100%, we need to follow up. We need to have that education campaign.

You're right; the CKC has stuff that they put out—Humane Canada. There are a lot of animal welfare organizations, and we all individually do things, but collectively, if it starts at the provincial level and we all filter it out and we're all sending that same strong message—it's going to take help to get the word out and to have people really start listening. That's what it comes down to—they're not knowing where to go or what to do, and they do feel bad, and they do adopt. They go and they think that they're saving these dogs, and then in a few months, they're coming to the shelters because they realize these dogs are aggressive, or they thought they were adopting a chihuahua and it has turned into this large thing. So it does become, in the industry, more of a systemic problem. It starts with a consumer and ends in the animal shelters, with us trying to figure out how to try to rehome them to the next possible place.

Ms. Jess Dixon: What impact does this have on shelter staff? I would imagine it's pretty traumatic having to continue dealing with this type of overpopulation.

Ms. Lindsey Narraway: It is. I'm sure Mike can talk to that, as well. Seeing the same things happen over and over again—in our field of animal care, compassion fatigue, stress, all of those things are just as high as when we're in all the other emergency fields. It is really difficult to turn around and see these dogs and puppies being dumped

everywhere, or people literally sometimes just showing up to the animal shelters—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Ms. Lindsey Narraway:—lying and stating that they're not sure what to do with this dog or that they just found it. It is very disheartening, and it is hard on a lot of the staff.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Seeing as we don't have much time left, I'll jump to Mike, if you want to comment on that same question.

Mr. Mike Mulick: Yes, we see the same thing regularly. I'd say this is the first time we have more dogs than cats in our shelter. It has never been this way before. Dogs lately have become a very serious issue. Staff are running around trying to find additional crates and carriers that we can put dogs into above the kennels that are already full, just to provide some temporary relief until we can find homes for dogs.

Like I said, the past year or so, ever since the cost of living has gone up, has been difficult times for almost every animal shelter in North America.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the official opposition. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I appreciate the opportunity. I wanted to start my questioning with Mr. Mike Mulick.

Sir, earlier this morning, the Solicitor General commented about the importance to have municipalities involved with partnering up to protect animals and to ensure that cruelty to animals can be prevented, but I think we didn't really get a sense from the Solicitor General of what that partnership could look like.

What type of relationship are you looking for from the government? Specifically, what does the partnership look like, from your vantage point, that municipalities and this government should be partnering on to ensure that animals can be further protected?

Mr. Mike Mulick: There are definitely opportunities for collaboration between municipalities and the province. I know that we've experienced difficulties in developing that relationship and that response.

Our staff are in the field, so we're able to respond immediately to these types of calls, and we end up having to place a call to the provincial inspectors, and sometimes there are significant delays in hearing back. So we're doing our best to collect the evidence that would be required to prosecute this, knowing that it is going to have to be turned over to the province, and it's sometimes weeks before we even receive a call back. So there is that difficulty. What that looks like in terms of having some sort of shared responsibilities or a better partnership is something that I would definitely be open to entertaining.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: When I asked the Solicitor General what would be the standard response time from the province to any type of complaint, he didn't specify a specific standard—but rather a bit of a more general phrase, "As soon as possible."

Does the city of Brampton have a standard response for their 311 request times?

Mr. Mike Mulick: We do have levels of service that we provide for something where there was animal welfare in question. We would respond immediately.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: What would that response time be? What would be a reasonable response time for an animal service request?

Mr. Mike Mulick: For an injured animal? I would say within an hour.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: One hour?

Mr. Mike Mulick: Yes—that we would respond to an injured animal or an animal welfare type of issue. There are other responses that we provide, where it could be half a day before we get there.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Would it be helpful if the province established a standard response time to complaints that fall under the act?

Mr. Mike Mulick: Yes, most definitely, especially since these complaints are definitely of a serious nature. There should be standards in response.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: When the province is not responding in a timely fashion, does your municipality just stand by and wait until a provincial response comes out, or do you then step into the role, where there is an absence of action from the province, where you just take up the responsibility? The average taxpayer, the resident who has made the call, doesn't care which order of government delivers the service, as long as it's acted upon.

Mr. Mike Mulick: We have taken some action in the sense of using what we have under our bylaws to try to impact some change, but again, the consequences under our bylaws are nowhere near as significant as what they are under the provincial legislation. We do try to reach back out to PAWS to get updates on cases that we've put in. Usually, our message is taken and we're told that somebody will get back to us when they're able to.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much.

My next question is to Ms. Labchuk. Welcome. It's nice to see you here in the committee.

You were interviewed by the CBC with respect to your response to the bill, and I thought the things that you said were important for us to bring forward. I suspect you repeated this in your presentation.

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One of the things I want to flag is that PAWS, since they've taken over the enforcement of animal services from the OSPCA from 2019, have seen their budget increase to \$21 million. So there technically are more inspectors and more bylaw enforcement officers, but we've also seen the actions that one would expect with more funding fall significantly. The number of orders that are issued and charges that are laid have fallen significantly.

What would you say to the Solicitor General, if he was here today, in response to that alarming statistic going in the opposite and wrong direction?

Ms. Camille Labchuk: I would say I'm very alarmed by the situation with PAWS right now. I can say, as somebody who regularly files enforcement complaints with animal welfare services, that we typically don't get a response to those. There's a lack of information provided.

Having tried to file FOIs with animal welfare services yields a similar situation. Generally, I don't think we've ever received a response to an FOI. There's always an

excuse of an investigation ongoing or some other reason they can't provide the information.

So I would say there's a lot of opacity right now about how this service is operating, and I would say that it's probably incumbent on the Solicitor General to undertake a full audit of the service, get that information, share it publicly, and figure out what needs to change and how that needs to be reformed.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: And yet, there is no audit that's attached to this bill; there's no accountability mechanism with respect to how the service is responding to the complaints of Ontarians; and there's obviously no money attached to it—so it's literally no money in terms of more resources, because the resources that PAWS has don't seem to be delivering the outcome that I think the ministry probably anticipated when they set it up.

I want to ask about accountability, because I think that's pretty important. This is an issue that people across Ontario deeply care about. Obviously, we want animals to be protected, and we want the bad actors, as the Solicitor General mentioned several times this morning, to be held accountable. But when you don't have adequate investigation, enforcement and then, ultimately, prosecution, having a fine of \$25,000 or \$100,000 may not be punitive or threatening enough.

What would you offer us in terms of advice on how this bill can be further strengthened?

Ms. Camille Labchuk: I'm very concerned that we will come back here in a year or two from now and there may not have been a single prosecution under the provisions under the PUPS Act, because of this inability to enforce the laws based primarily on—well, lots of factors, but one of those factors being the lack of licensing and registration of breeders. No one knows where they're operating right now—including animal welfare services and the province. If we can't suss out where these folks are breeding dogs, we can't determine if they're complying with the laws, and we can't enforce the laws against them.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the independent member. You may begin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Exactly where you left off is where I want to start.

This morning, there were a few questions that were put to the minister where we were asking for numbers on exactly how many of these producers are across the province. Unfortunately, we didn't have a true reflection of what those numbers are, hence one of the biggest problems is what was identified: that there is no mechanism for accountability. We don't know where they're being produced, how many are being produced, what is being produced. There's no standard that is put in place.

I think what you're asking for is a licensing process that would give us those numbers, or at least begin to bring us to that path to establishing an actual, true audit of what is actually out there.

I would like you to comment a little bit more on the necessity of actually having a licensing process.

Ms. Camille Labchuk: Thank you for the question.

I think it's essential to any regulatory regime that authorities be able to know where the regulated entities are

operating. You simply can't enforce the laws without doing that. You just can't imagine a situation where you don't need a licence to drive a vehicle or you don't need to register your vehicle, and then expect police to somehow enforce the rules of the road, so it's absolutely critical to ensuring that laws are actually being complied with. It would have a lot of other benefits, too, in terms of that structure that you could then build on.

First of all, as I mentioned, this problem with online sales: I think you could start to take a bite out of that if every person who sold animals had to have a licence number associated with those sales. That could be posted at the place of sale physically if it's in person, or in an online advertisement via their own website, potentially. I think that once you start tracking licensees, you've got the potential for public transparency. In the United States, for instance, for individuals who are regulated under the USDA and the Animal Welfare Act, who breed dogs and who are engaged in this business—there is quite a lot of information publicly available about those breeders. That person who wants to purchase a puppy or do business with a dog breeder broker can actually go and look that information up. So there are a lot of benefits that come both in terms of being able to enforce the law, but public transparency, as well.

The final point is the ability to take quick action to deal with a problematic breeder. Right now, if animal welfare services saw that there was somebody who was breeding dogs who seemed to be breaking some rules, it would be very challenging for them to shut down that entire operation. They would likely have to lay charges, go through the court process, hope for a conviction and hope that the judge or justice of the peace would impose conditions that the breeder can't have dogs in the future. If there was an ability just to quickly pull a licence for non-compliance with conditions, that could tackle the problem so much more quickly and so much more cost-effectively.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I think that goes into the next question that I have for you.

You mentioned non-enforceable actions that are not contained within the context of this bill.

What are some of those enforceable actions that you would like to see reflected in this bill in order to give it some teeth and some meat—that individual enforcement officers can actually go and lay the charges and hold the individual breeders who are not following the standards?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Ms. Camille Labchuk: I think one of those issues is promulgating regulations that have very detailed standards. I think oftentimes the way we see standards for animal welfare written out, it would say something like, "Make sure an animal has adequate space or sufficient water." We favour standards that are a bit more specific because that's easier to enforce. For instance, making sure that a dog of a specific pound size has X amount of space listed out in numbers and not just using words like "adequate;" listing the frequency of how often dogs' living quarters have to be cleaned; continuous access to clean, potable drinking water; how many minutes of exercise per day they should

receive—so just laying out very, very specific standards, coupled with strong record-keeping requirements, which the act does go some way towards including some of those. But I think that there could be more.

Mr. Michael Mantha: And I think that goes directly to consumer safety.

Ms. Camille Labchuk: Absolutely. It's very well-known at this point that breeders are engaging in practices that result in poorer health for dogs and disappointed, heartbroken families who buy dogs and are then saddled with massive vet bills and often lose their beloved family members.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the government member. MPP McGregor.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Thank you to all of the witnesses for testifying here today. I really appreciate it. It's an important issue that we're trying to get a handle on here, and your testimony is invaluable as we try to address it.

I want to ask a question to Mr. Mulick. First off, thank you for everything that you guys do at Brampton Animal Services. As a Brampton boy myself, not only am I a big fan of the promotional sunglasses that you gave me last year at the Brampton Farmers' Market that I still keep in my car and wear, but I'm also just a big fan of your organization and everything you've done. Actually, I got my foster application—I can't permanently rescue a dog just with the Queen's Park nature of everything I do, but I'm looking to foster in the summer. If Bodhi or Butter Ball are still there from the recent video that I saw you guys put out, I think they will have a temporary home, anyway, at casa McGregor.

I wanted to ask you a little bit about your expertise in some of the on-the-ground realities that we've seen in Brampton. If you could tell us a bit about what we've seen in terms of harmful dog-breeding practices and some of the dogs that you've been able to save, and then with those substandard conditions and those harmful practices—what does that do to the behavioural condition of the dog, and how do they cope with that?

Mr. Mike Mulick: Through the Chair: Thank you for your comments. We're doing our best to try to get as many animals into foster care as we can, which then opens up space for us to take in these additional animals, so any assistance is always appreciated.

In terms of your question on poor breeding, we've been taking in puppies that have been coming in blind, puppies that have numerous, various issues that we have to try to then medically correct after the fact before we can even put these animals up for adoption. Behaviour is probably the biggest issue. When puppies aren't socialized early on, they develop behaviours that a lot of times cannot be corrected. Ultimately, most of these animals that come into the shelter have to get euthanized simply because we cannot risk putting them back out into the community. The vast majority of this comes from under-socialized animals.

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That's generally what our issue is—smaller operations, backyard breeders in the city, that are producing as many puppies as they can with several dogs, and again, sometimes siblings, as well. The impact that it's having is poorly

behaved dogs, that are then leading to an increase in dog attacks in the city, much like Toronto and other municipalities are experiencing as well, or animals being surrendered to us almost on a daily basis. Many, unfortunately, don't get a chance to leave the shelter, just because the behavioural changes that have happened to them can't be undone.

Mr. Graham McGregor: If we're able to get a bill forward that cracks down on puppy mills here in Ontario, do you think that will directly help with the shelters and what you guys are seeing on the ground? Would that help the shelter capacity in Brampton?

Mr. Mike Mulick: Most definitely. My bigger issue will be the capacity for enforcement of the bill. But putting these things into place, at a very minimum, will definitely, I hope, dissuade people from engaging in these practices. Combine that with enforcement, and I believe that it would put a significant dent in the number of puppies that are being produced. There are other suggestions, such as licensing. That would potentially take it even one step further.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Riddell.

Mr. Brian Riddell: My question is for Lindsey. I would like to get your perspective on the proposed amendments to Bill 159.

Ms. Lindsey Narraway: Overall, we are pleased, just like everyone else. There are some areas that could be strengthened—definitely, the socialization component of it.

The intent of the legislation, to ban puppy mills—100%. We are definitely well on board for that, but we are very much concerned with the regulation aspect of it that I did talk about, because a lot of it does rest with the ability of the inspectors to be able to go out and then act on what they are finding. What we are really hoping is that we will be able to have some regulations in place, so that the officers can act on it to actually be able to help these dogs that are in distress.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Is there anything else you would like to add to the bill if you were sitting on this side of the bench?

Ms. Lindsey Narraway: Definitely, adding that timeline. If you could add that to the bill, I think that would be huge—as to a timeline as to when that regulation will be out and active. It could go as far as adding a clause that does talk about the socialization and how that is mandatory—and the enrichment, because that does tie into how these dogs are developing as they start to get older, as Mike and the other speaker mentioned.

So if there are those abilities to add in a bit more on that standard of care—I think that would also go to help a lot.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Thank you for your comments.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Madam Chair, what's our time?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): A minute and 14 seconds.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank all of our presenters for coming to share your expertise with us today. I will start with Camille.

You mentioned that Canada generally has weak rules in force. My understanding is that this legislation is actually—

the first jurisdiction in Canada that is introducing some guidelines along these lines—other than the municipal guidelines. I would imagine that having a province-wide regime would be helpful. Otherwise, it was just left up to individual municipalities to jump into the fray if they so chose and had the bandwidth to do it.

You did mention briefly the records retention. We're looking at introducing vaccine records and vet records for purchasers of dogs from breeders.

You've been very clear, I think, in your additions, in terms of enforcement.

I'm wondering if you can point us to a jurisdiction that you think has it right.

Ms. Camille Labchuk: Thank you for the question.

Just one point off the top is that Quebec did introduce some rules a couple of years ago. Quebec was known and ranked repeatedly for having the worst puppy mill—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time that we have. That concludes this round.

We'll now go to the NDP for the final round. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you again, Chair, for the opportunity.

Back to Ms. Labchuk: You were just speaking about the type of jurisdiction that actually maybe is doing it right, that we can emulate. You were starting to speak about Quebec. Can you finish your thought?

Ms. Camille Labchuk: Quebec did introduce rules for dog breeders a few years ago. They do require licensing for dogs over a certain number—I believe it's 50, for breeding. I believe you have somebody coming from HSI soon, during this committee's study of the bill, who can speak more to that, because they were directly involved in that work. Quebec has taken some steps. I would not say what Quebec has is sufficient. I think 50 dogs is still far too many dogs, to assure their welfare. That's an enormous number of dogs to handle. I think anyone who has lived with more than one dog can understand how they can be a handful, and 50 is a lot.

California has some reasonable standards that I think are worth considering.

The European Union has also produced a document with guidelines that elucidates some standards that are useful.

I would also urge members to look to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals position statement on standards of care for dog breeding, which are all useful.

British Columbia did introduce a bill that never ended up coming into force, to regulate dog breeding, which is somewhat more detailed than what we're considering here in Ontario. There was also a private members' bill introduced prior to that, in BC, I believe in 2012, that lays out what I think is quite a good framework for the regulation.

I'll be sure to reference all of these in my submissions to the committee.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: That would be extremely helpful. I think it's good for us to know whether or not Ontario is the very first jurisdiction in Canada to introduce such an act, and it sounds like we are not. We do want to

improve the conditions that are here for the animals—especially for puppies, which we all love.

I want to clarify—and this is a question for both of you, Ms. Labchuk as well as Ms. Narraway. With respect to the licensing requirement—the licensing and registration request that’s on the table from your organizations, but not yet a requirement in this bill—would you go as far as saying that we should be banning all puppy mills in Ontario? If so, can you elaborate on the benefits of that versus the benefits of creating a licensing and registration regime? Right now, neither one is on the table.

Ms. Camille Labchuk: I would say that if a licensing regime is done well, it would have the effect of banning puppy mills. If you impose licensing conditions that require a strict limit on the number of dogs that can be bred, which should be quite low—definitely, fewer than 10, probably lower than that—then you would be able to take a huge chunk out of those large puppy mill operations, effectively accomplishing that type of ban.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Ms. Narraway?

Ms. Lindsey Narraway: I agree.

Actually, for us, within the city of Pickering, many years ago, when there wasn’t any legislation—so I’m glad to see it coming forward—a lot of municipalities had to go out and they actually enacted some breeding bylaws. So that essentially is that licensing component that we have right now within the city of Pickering.

Being able to take some of that information and put that into the bill, definitely—because the issue is, anyone who is actually a good breeder is going to comply with the licensing, is going to be able to be following and be happy to be registered. It will allow us to find those people, I think, more effectively and shut them down, to have them not breed, if they’re not able to be part of the registry.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to you both for those answers.

I want to come back to something that’s kind of—it’s a response from the Solicitor General that stuck in my head, and that is the fact that he did not know or neither did the assistant deputy know how many puppy mills there are in Ontario.

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I have learned that a group called Stop the Mills, which I think is primarily run by volunteers—and probably crowdsourcing information—through complaints that they may be receiving, estimates that there are about 400 puppy mills in Ontario.

Does it surprise you that the ministry, with all its resources—plus an actual department that’s tasked with the job of enforcement and investigation—doesn’t know how many puppy mills are in Ontario, and yet a non-profit, volunteer-based organization seems to have a better grasp on the actual quantum in the province?

This question is for Ms. Labchuk.

Ms. Camille Labchuk: Thank you for the question.

It is surprising. I think that given how much people in this province care about dogs, it’s incumbent on the administration of the province to get a grasp on this issue. I would expect more information. But from another perspective, I’m not surprised, because they really don’t have

an adequate way of tracking these puppy mills right now. Without licensing and registration and any sort of enforcement over them, it’s not really surprising that there isn’t great data.

I really commend the work of groups like Stop the Mills. They have been tracking individual cases of suspected puppy mills; they’ve been filing enforcement complaints and trying to get action, typically to no avail; and they’ve been working with municipalities to try to enact municipal bans, in the absence of a provincial one.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: That’s very helpful.

Given the fact that all three of you are working in this space around animal protection and animal welfare, with respect to your knowledge—and you may or may not know, but I want to ask the question—are you aware of any puppy mills that have been shut down by the province within the last year? You folks are the experts. You’re tracking this information. If you don’t have your fingers on the pulse, I’m not sure who does.

Ms. Camille Labchuk: I’m not aware of any. I’m aware of alleged puppy mills that are operating, and none of those have been shut down.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Mr. Mulick?

Mr. Mike Mulick: I am not aware of any either.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Ms. Narraway?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Ms. Lindsey Narraway: I’m not aware of if anything has been shut down. I am aware that the government has brought animals into a variety of our animal shelters, through our organizations. But the outcome of those? I’m not sure.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Because we haven’t seen a lot of action so far—despite the fact that we’ve got more enforcement officers, technically a much larger budget, and a professionalized service of enforcement—are you nervous that this bill will go ahead without any strengthening amendments, and that perhaps it will fall short of its intentions?

I’ll start with you, Mr. Mulick, and all three of you are welcome to answer this question.

Mr. Mike Mulick: Again, I think we’ve all agreed that the intent is great, but there definitely needs to be a capacity for enforcement. We do have concerns with enforcement as it is right now—never mind increasing their responsibilities with that addition.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): That’s all the time that we have.

I’d like to thank our presenters for being here today. You are now released.

HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL/CANADA
CANADIAN KENNEL CLUB
HUMANE INITIATIVE

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We’ll now turn to our next group of presenters, beginning with Humane Society International. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: I'm Ewa Demianowicz, and I am a senior campaign manager for Humane Society International/Canada. HSI/Canada represents tens of thousands of supporters across the country and is proud to be part of Humane Society International, one of the largest animal protection organizations in the world.

Putting an end to cruel puppy mills has been one of the top priorities of our organization. Since 2008, HSI/Canada has assisted the Quebec government and local SPCAs in the closure of more than a dozen unethical breeding operations. In that time, we have assisted in the rescue, sheltering, rehabilitation and placement of more than 2,000 animals from situations of severe neglect and cruelty. This includes the largest seizure in Canadian history of animals from a puppy mill, conducted in partnership with the Quebec government, with HSI/Canada assuming the care of more than 500 dogs and puppies.

HSI/Canada has also driven significant animal welfare reforms at provincial and municipal levels, including the updating of Quebec's animal welfare provisions, which included regulations pertaining to commercial breeding.

On my first day with HSI/Canada, about 12 years ago, I was present at the closure of a puppy mill in Quebec. I had never been inside one before. Although I knew what a puppy mill was, it was a shocking view. Seeing so many dogs trapped in small and filthy wire cages, stacked on top of each other, desperately wanting to get out, was definitely heartbreaking. Even more disturbing was the unbearable and suffocating smell, filled with ammonia, that hits you as you enter and that the dogs endure constantly. What I learned with time is that I would witness this scene many times over.

Puppy mills are common, and they are all the same—multiple dogs kept in filthy cages, unbearable smells, matted dogs covered in urine and feces, and visible suffering. Surprisingly, these facilities are never recognizable from the outside. These horror-like scenes are often hidden behind closed doors, very typical nice-looking and clean homes and buildings.

Puppy mills exist because the public is duped into buying animals from these unethical breeders. Cute online ads of puppies or puppies sold in pet shops attract consumers who are unaware of what their money is supporting. This is why it is important to tackle this issue with legislation and enforcement.

Today, we hope that you will take this opportunity to make amendments to the PUPS Act and include mandatory licensing of commercial breeding facilities, a cap on the number of animals allowed in breeding facilities, improved standards of care, and ensuring proper enforcement.

Licensing commercial breeding facilities is a critical first step in shutting down puppy mills in Ontario. As we know, puppy mills operate behind closed doors, hiding behind misleading advertisements and marketing tactics and with major traceability issues. Stories of people buying sick puppies online and losing traces of the seller after the purchase are, sadly, very common. Puppy milling is a business, and its business model is to make a profit, at the cost of the welfare of the breeding animals. Licensing is a way to improve accountability, traceability and conformity

to laws and regulations, as well as for the government to gather very valuable information on this industry.

To ensure enforcement of any standard we are discussing today, the province must not only license all commercial breeders, but also inspect them at least once a year and upon complaint, and have strong penalties for non-compliance. This is a common measure adopted by many other jurisdictions in the US and in Canada, such as in New Brunswick and in Quebec.

We strongly suggest to also limit the number of dogs allowed in breeding facilities. Puppy mills are known to operate in high volume to gain more profits, to the detriment of animal welfare. This measure would give dogs a much better chance at a better quality of life, as it has the potential to lead to better maintenance of a minimum standard of care for the animals. It has been witnessed that the higher the volume of the breeding operation, the lower the quality of life of the breeding animals in the facility. This is not to say that smaller-operation puppy mills are not problematic. But it is a way to put an end to massive, high-volume operations that are always unethical.

Additionally, we are currently facing a pet overpopulation crisis, as you've heard. Every year, because of a lack of homes, thousands of animals are euthanized. Shelters, rescue groups and humane societies are struggling in placing adoptable animals, and people are surrendering pets daily. High-volume puppy mills contribute to this problem by selling large volumes of unsterilized puppies without the possibility for buyers to return them in case of issues. By limiting the number of breeding animals allowed in breeding facilities, this problem can be tackled at source. This is a measure that exists elsewhere, in several US states, like Louisiana, Oregon, Virginia and Washington state. More recently, the province of Quebec adopted this measure.

There are many aspects of commercial dog breeding that still need to be addressed in the legislation, and we hope there will be an opportunity—if not in amendments; in regulations that follow. These measures include proper housing requirements; improved consideration of the psychological well-being of the animals; a prohibition on certain surgical procedures, such as tail docking or ear cropping; mandatory veterinary care; mandatory retirement plans for retired breeding dogs to limit convenience euthanasia; and conditions on selling and transferring animals and on advertisements.

1400

Lastly, it is crucial that strong legislation is backed by—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: Although improving laws and regulations are a first step towards improving animal welfare and stopping puppy mills, without proper enforcement, they will not be effective. Not only should appropriate resources be devoted to ensure proper inspections and timely responses to complaints throughout the province, but proper intervention and action must be taken when infractions to laws and regulations are occurring.

It is time to put an end to the cruelty of puppy mills, and we believe that, with amendments and strong regulations to follow, the PUPS Act has the potential to achieve its goal.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to our next presenter, the Canadian Kennel Club. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Mr. John Atkinson: I'm John Atkinson. I'm the director of advocacy and communications for the Canadian Kennel Club.

Thank you very much for having us here this afternoon. It's my pleasure to be here on behalf of our over 6,300 Ontario members at the Canadian Kennel Club. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss the impacts of the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act on responsible breeders.

The Canadian Kennel Club is a national, member-based, non-profit organization incorporated under the Animal Pedigree Act, serving as the primary registry for purebred dogs in Canada. CKC has a number of requirements and conditions that require full adherence by our members, including a code of practice, a code of ethics, bylaws, rules, regulations, policies and procedures, and that is to ensure the health and well-being of our dogs and all dogs. Our breeders are committed to promoting responsible breeding practices. Those who violate our policies face a comprehensive tribunal process that ensures accountability and upholds the highest care requirements.

We assist prospective puppy buyers in their search by providing guidance on how to find an accountable breeder, including valuable sources such as breed clubs. We also publicize member breeders who face disciplinary action.

While we support measures aimed at improving canine well-being, certain provisions of this bill could unduly penalize responsible breeders. For example, the restrictions on breeding frequency do not consider the varied needs across breeds, potentially leading to unintended health consequences.

Moreover, the broad prohibition on the sale or transfer of dogs can significantly impact legitimate activities, including those by CKC member breeders. Additionally, the act's prohibition against the sale or transfer of dogs could impede the essential transfer of ownership that occurs within our community. CKC-registered breeders often transfer puppies to new owners who may raise them for show, competition or breeding purposes. Our member breeders also enter into non-breeding agreements to ensure that dogs who are not intended to be bred are not bred.

We seek amendments that focus on penalizing irresponsible practices without affecting responsible breeders. By working together, we can assure legislation that is responsible, non-discriminatory and enforceable, ultimately benefiting the well-being of dogs across Ontario.

I'll now turn my time over to Pamela Bruce, a long-standing and valued member of CKC, who can talk to you about the impact the bill could have on our breeders.

Ms. Pamela Bruce: Thank you, John.

My name is Pamela Bruce. As John said, I'm a long-time member of the Canadian Kennel Club. I'm one of our dedicated preservation breeders. I'm just here to share a bit of a breeder's viewpoint on the potential effects of this legislation on those of us dedicated to the health and welfare of dogs.

Responsible breeders like myself are truly, deeply committed to every dog's welfare—not just within the Canadian Kennel Club; it's important to us for all dogs. We adhere to the CKC's thorough policies and ensure the long-term well-being of all dogs, utilizing health testing, ethical breeding practices and following good animal husbandry practices. We have thorough record-keeping and find it essential to ensure best practices. All Canadian Kennel Club members and breeders must maintain detailed private breeding records according to the CKC bylaws and are subject to inspections by the CKC as needed.

We are in support of section 14.1 of the act. Instead of the issue at hand—the blanket bans and the stringent restrictions—we propose a more effective approach, which is mandatory permanent identification, supported by a robust database, combined with comprehensive record-keeping. Mandatory permanent identification would enable accurate traceability of a dog from its origin—from the breeder—to its owner, along with other information such as health history. This would be crucial for enforcing breeding standards and ensuring that puppies are bred and raised in healthy, humane conditions. It also serves as a deterrent against the operation of puppy mills by making it harder for such entities to actually hide their activities.

Certain aspects of the proposed legislation are unnecessary but could also burden responsible breeders. For example, the act's blanket restrictions on breeding frequencies, such as limiting a female dog to no more than three pregnancies within a two-year period, do not account for vast differences, especially amongst toy breeds, where the breeding aspects are very different. For larger breeds, alternatively, they may only cycle once every 12 months, and often start breeding only after rigorous health assessments and competition. These restrictions could lead to increased health risks, including conditions like cystic endometrial hyperplasia, pyometra and severe infections that can be life-threatening—and life-altering, really.

In conclusion, we request that regulations be developed that are thoughtful and nuanced, acknowledging the complexities of dog breeding, while ensuring they can be measured, enforced, amended—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Ms. Pamela Bruce: Thank you—as science evolves. As a community of dedicated breeders, we're very eager to help develop these regulations to safeguard all dogs without hindering responsible breeders who are integral to the solution. The Canadian Kennel Club is ready to support the Ministry of the Solicitor General's office in developing and promoting public education campaigns about finding responsible breeders and responsible dog ownership and breeding practices.

Thank you again for considering these perspectives of responsible breeders in this critical discussion. We look forward to contributing to the framework that supports the health and welfare of all dogs.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to our third presenter, Humane Initiative. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Ms. Donna Power: I want to thank everyone on this committee for giving me this opportunity to speak with you. I believe all of you have been distributed my presentation deck. For the purposes of time, I'm going to use a condensed version, but you've all been given the full deck.

My name is Donna Power. I'm co-founder and president of Humane Initiative. Our mandate is to bring about legislative changes, enforcement policies and transparency that will improve the lives of animals. We believe that animals are sentient beings, and thus should be afforded the right to live their lives free of distress, pain, abuse and neglect; live in clean, disease-free living spaces; and have access to fresh air, socialization and exercise.

I come before you today as an advocate for the animals, not as an activist against this government.

Currently, in Ontario—dog breeders nor brokers who sell these animals are licensed. People who partake in commercial dog breeding—a.k.a. puppy mills—are completely off the radar of any sort of oversight, enforcement or taxation, and because these individuals are in the shadows, the true number of puppy mills in this province is hard to ascertain. Many leading animal welfare organizations in Canada put that number of puppy mills in Canada somewhere between 500 and 1,100, but again, it's very hard to ascertain because of the way in which they operate.

Both Premier Ford and Minister Kerzner have repeatedly told the people of Ontario that they have a zero-tolerance policy in regard to abuse, and while on the surface that statement is very impressive, and they've indicated they have the strictest penalties, it doesn't really go far enough. Unfortunately, having these strict penalties is meaningless if the bad actors in this field cannot be identified.

1410

Before I delve into the PUPS Act—I am not against ethical, responsible breeding whatsoever.

While on the surface this statement is very impressive, having the strictest penalties is meaningless unless the legislation is clear, specific, measurable and enforceable. Unfortunately, having these strict penalties is meaningless, as the bad actors are just invisible. The PUPS Act, in its current form, does not address in any way how the government intends to identify these bad actors. That should fall under the standards set forth in the legislation. It includes nothing about identifying breeders, and nothing about licensing or taxing their substantial income. To simplify this, it does not matter how strict the penalties are and how specific the lists of breeding practices that breeders must adhere to are if there's no way to identify who these individuals are. There's nothing in place where the government is introducing a model that will be proactive in its identification and enforcement.

Animal welfare in this province is at a crisis point in regard to companion animals, and specifically dogs. Rescues, shelters and humane societies are beyond capacity. They are struggling to keep their doors open. Rescues receive zero in regard to government funding; they are run strictly by volunteers. Yet they're asked to carry a heavy and growing financial burden in regard to taking in more and more sick animals due to the puppy mills. Companion

animals in this province are being euthanized for space alone at levels we've never seen before.

More and more sick animals are being sold to the people of Ontario. While consumers must be more diligent when buying a puppy, the government must put in place safeguards to protect the consumers of this province. What these buyers are facing are 100% preventable contagious diseases such as parvo and distemper. They're coming home with people, with severe parasite infections; even zoonotic diseases that are transferrable between animals and humans. They are facing enormous veterinary bills, which results in the owner having to euthanize a puppy that in many cases is treatable but out of reach financially. The government has introduced nothing to allow purchasers to have any sort of traceability back to the origins of the puppies, and therefore they're left with nothing in regard to getting an account or finding out what this puppy's veterinary history is.

We believe that this province is at a turning point in regard to the crisis. The people of this province cannot be left unprotected from unscrupulous breeders and sellers. The animals do not deserve to be left to endure this existence—and it is just an existence.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Ms. Donna Power: These are living, breathing beings.

As I end this, I've got six images that have been shared with you. I'll ask that they come up on the screen, please.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. We'll now turn to—

Ms. Donna Power: The images—can everyone see that?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes.

Ms. Donna Power: Thank you. Just to be clear, these images that I'm sharing with you are all in Ontario, and they're all within the last two to three years. I was personally involved in each one of these puppy mills, so I can validate that these are true images from the province of Ontario.

This is a breeder dog from Kingsville, Ontario—an unlicensed breeder, very well-known to the municipality. They do a number of Doodle-type breeds. This poor girl has been bred incessantly. She's a senior girl now. This was a litter done just in the last eight months.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Unfortunately, your time is up, so we'll have to stop it there, but I'm sure someone will ask you more about this during the question time. Thank you for sharing those images.

This round of questions will begin with the government.
MPP Dixon.

Ms. Jess Dixon: My question is directed towards Humane Society International/Canada. Can you talk a little bit more about the licensing aspect? I know that something happened in Quebec. I'm wondering if you've put any thought into what that would look like in Ontario.

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: The licensing system in Quebec is not perfect, but it was a way for the government to actually determine what was happening on the ground.

The biggest problem with the puppy mill issue is the fact that breeders are operating without any sort of registration, without anyone knowing where they are and without any sort of government oversight.

The licensing system was introduced to gather information and see where breeders are located, what type of facilities they are working with, how many animals they are keeping, what kind of records they have. It was a great first step. It came with different levels of permits. It tackles not only breeders, but pet shops, rescue groups, shelters—any person who owns more than a certain number of animals.

I think it would be a good start for Ontario to model this type of licensing system in order to determine what is happening on the ground—having a record of breeders throughout the province—and then follow up with proper enforcement of these facilities, going in and seeing what is happening and making sure that these operations are following legislation.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Was there a cost associated with applying for a licence?

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: There is a cost. I would say for commercial breeding operations, it does not represent a big amount. It should be part of operational expenses, given the massive profits that these operations are getting from selling these animals. There is a cost to have a permit. It's an annual cost that has to be paid to renew the licence year after year, and it does represent certain funds for the government to then do enforcement and seize animals if needed.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: Chair, through you to Donna: Thank you very much for joining us today. I love in-person, but it's also nice to meet people online, especially if you have a long ways to go.

You seem to know so much, Donna, about what's going on on the ground in the province of Ontario. I know another member wants to go, so I don't want to take all the time, but I was wondering if you could fill out a little bit more about what your experience is in what's going on on the ground in the province of Ontario, please.

Ms. Donna Power: Puppy mills have always been around. They've always been a big problem, but with the introduction of COVID, it really did create this perfect storm—and I talk about this in the full deck—where people were in lockdown, they were at home, and they were wanting puppies, where before, when they had busy lives outside of their home, they didn't have that. All of a sudden, the demand for puppies and kittens became absolutely insatiable. There was no ability for dogs to come in across the borders; rescues were, in a sense, “sold out” of puppies; and commercial dog breeders and backyard breeders stepped in very willingly to fill this void. This has been three or four years now—we are now seeing the demand for puppies kind of drop off. Unfortunately, the market is flooded with dogs. Humane societies, shelters, rescues are absolutely jammed full due to owner surrenders and also even some breeders who are saying, “I don't want this.” They don't want an 18-week-old puppy, because they now have to feed that puppy. We're seeing so many dogs dumped and abandoned in the middle of nowhere.

I can't even say how much this is a crisis. It's so incredibly—I don't want to say 100% avoidable, but we can make so many changes that will make a direct impact on this crisis. I don't use those words softly—when I say “crisis.” It truly is a crisis like we've never seen in Ontario.

1420

Mr. Will Bouma: What we're trying to do is timely, and we need to get it right.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll turn to MPP Riddell.

Mr. Brian Riddell: My question is for the CKC. How do you think this bill will help you with moving forward?

Mr. John Atkinson: I would think that the bill is a positive step forward. When you talk about regulations, it comes down to enforcement and the ability to actually track a dog and an actual bad actor, like a puppy mill or backyard breeder. Our members are abiding by many rules and regulations already that we have had in place for decades on end. Our hope is that the bill actually targets the bad actors versus our member breeders, who are doing the right thing and are faced in the right direction, towards health and well-being of the dog.

Ultimately, in order to suss out and find where these breeders are, we recommend things like mandatory permanent identification so that dogs can be traced and tracked back to the owner, and associated with other things—

Mr. Brian Riddell: Through the chip.

Mr. John Atkinson: The microchipping, yes, would be one of the effective ways to do that. You can associate health information—and many could identify, if there's an unhealthy puppy, where it came from, whether it has changed ownership. If you have a robust—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Mr. John Atkinson:—database, you can associate other information like inspections or breeding records. That, combined with robust breeding records, is really key to being able to ensure that the bad actors are targeted; not the accountable breeders, like our members.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the official opposition. MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch. Thank you to the presenters.

Donna Power, just a couple of slide decks that you had there, maybe a couple of pictures, if you can share in a minute, a minute and a half—that you were going to do before.

Ms. Donna Power: This one on the screen right now is from an unlicensed breeder in eastern Ontario, in White-water Region, Renfrew county. This was a breeder who was very well known in the community. It was no secret that he was operating. The dogs were on a property with no running water, no electricity. They were in absolutely horrendous conditions. I've been there. Provincial animal services had been there three times, and nothing was done—it was not until, actually, some local rescues and my team at Humane Initiative started a public awareness campaign, and we just made everyone and their brother know about this municipality and that they were choosing not to make this person adhere to their bylaws. That's one image.

Next, please.

This is actually from the same breeder. This was a dog that was bred incessantly. That's a mammary tumour that has ruptured. She was bred after this rupture. She was left with no vet care whatsoever. She was pulled when we got

in there in September of last year, and she had to have multiple surgeries. She's with a very, very good rescue now.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, Chair. Would you mind just telling me the time on the clock?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much.

Donna, thank you very much for showing us these images. I suspect that unfortunately you may have a very large catalogue of images similar to that.

Your organization has done some remarkable work in raising awareness.

One thing that really stood out for me in your deputation was the amount of times that you've tried to interface with the enforcement agency and, I think, you have walked away empty-handed.

With respect to the challenges of getting enforcement out in a timely fashion, can you describe to us, on average, how long it takes for an enforcement officer or investigator to go out to take a look after a complaint has been made?

Ms. Donna Power: One of our biggest issues is the lack of transparency. They will not tell us if they're going, when they're going, what happened after they went. They will tell us absolutely nothing. So we have no idea if they actually went. It's not that we have eyes on the property and we'll see if they show up. So that has been incredibly frustrating. Can we not work together for the common good of these animals? We're not here to attack, and we know you care about animals, but we must come together. The lack of transparency is, bar none, the largest obstacle that we face.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: This is a question I asked to our previous presenters: Based on your history in this sector and the type of work that you've done over the decades, are you aware of any puppy mills in Ontario that have been closed in the last year, largely as a result of the work of PAWS?

Ms. Donna Power: Not really. I'm thinking of three big mills that were closed in the last year, and all three were because of public awareness campaigns. I guess I am proud to say that we made it so uncomfortable—their inaction—that they had to act. Even the ones with the puppies in eastern Ontario—PAWS was there when the over 30 dogs were removed, but they did not go in that building. They stayed outside, in the driveway, by their white vans, and all services—municipal animal services—had to go in and remove every single dog. We had three rescues standing by to take the dogs into their care, which they paid all the vet bills for.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Are you aware that PAWS has an annual budget of \$21 million and 100 inspectors on their payroll?

Ms. Donna Power: I am very much aware of that, yes.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: You've just confirmed for us that they haven't shut down, to the best of your knowledge, a single puppy mill in 12 months. And when you have seen puppy mills shut down, it has been largely due to public pressure and the outcry from the public.

Ms. Donna Power: I'm not really aware of any substantial operation that they have closed down, and I'm very aware of the budget. It's four times the budget that the OSPCA had. They're still at 100 inspectors, which they had on day one, and it's the same amount of inspectors that Manitoba has, which is one tenth the size of Ontario.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much.

My next question is for Ewa Demianowicz.

You folks have done remarkable work in Canada around animal welfare and protection. I recognize that you're probably one of the leading voices in the country when it comes to drafting legislation around protection of animals.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Was your organization ever contacted by the Ministry of the Solicitor General prior to the drafting of this bill?

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: No, we have not been contacted.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Based on your reading of the bill as it is provided to us today, it looks like there hasn't been a lot of research across jurisdictions even in North America; specifically Quebec, which is the most recent example. Does it surprise you that there hasn't been deeper research before putting out a bill like this? It's a government bill, not a private member's bill—a government bill with all the resources and the researchers that the government would have at their disposal.

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: We would have certainly hoped for more of a substantial change to the PAWS Act, an actual reform of what is in the legislation and trying to make it better. This bill is quite short. It addresses just a few elements of what a puppy mill is, which is basically—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time that we have.

1430

We'll now turn to the independent member for four and a half minutes. You may begin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Can you finish off what you were starting to explain, Ms. Demianowicz?

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: Of course, we would have loved to see much more in this bill, and we do hope that regulations will contain so much more about what is needed in order to really tackle the issue of puppy mills. We have heard it before, but general standards of care have to be strengthened, have to be much more precise and detailed than just a few lines. There are so many aspects and components to breeding that must be addressed in legislation that tries to oversee breeding of dogs or any animals. So it would be important to follow up with strong regulations if there are not further amendments to this bill.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Do you know how Quebec came to the number of 50 dogs? How did they come up with that number? Was it just pulled out of the air?

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: They limit, now, the breeding facilities to 50 dogs. It was a big step. We've had situations where breeding facilities were keeping 500 dogs, like I mentioned in my presentation—but we've seen others of 200 and 100, which is atrocious when you think of how many animals that represents and how many puppies that are after then sold, coming from these animals on the market.

So 50 is a number that we've seen in the US and that Quebec has adopted. We've advocated for a lower number even than that—25—but we were content that at least there is a cap, because what we were seeing on the ground was pretty shocking.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Having those licences now put in place in Quebec—has it led to decreased numbers of puppy mills? Has it improved? Has there been more accountability? Have there been better standards, more satisfaction on behalf of potential families who want to have additions to their family members?

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: I think it made a huge difference, of course, because in Quebec we started with practically no legislation overseeing breeding or just keeping animals. So we were seeing things that were completely unacceptable—to a place where we now have some standards of care in place, and authorities being able to use legislation and intervene when there are shocking, horrible conditions in which animals are kept. We've seen on the ground, first of all, the fact that we are no longer allowed to have 500 dogs or 200 dogs in breeding facilities—if an operation decides to keep as many, the government can shut it down right away. So, smaller breeding operations—but also the standards of care now are much more improved, so any inspector who goes into this place now has much more ability to intervene if it is a problem in breeding facilities. We definitely see a difference on the ground. It's not to say that these unethical breeding operations no longer exist—they continue to exist. They are still there. But we've gone from a very, very bad place to a tolerable place.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Are you familiar with the BC legislation that had been introduced and the private member's bill addressing this?

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: I reviewed it when it was introduced a few years ago.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Mr. Atkinson, I've got a couple of questions for you.

First, what's your favourite breed?

Mr. John Atkinson: I have two pugs at home.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You have two pugs?

Mr. John Atkinson: I love all breeds, Pam. I promise. But I do have two pugs.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm a huge fan of the shows that you put on. I sit in front of my TV and watch everything that you're doing.

Of your 6,600 members, how many of them are actual breeders? All of them or just—

Mr. John Atkinson: We have about 20,000 members across the country, and the members who are breeders are between 4,000 and 5,000 across the country—I'm not sure how many in Ontario, specifically. We have 6,600 members in Ontario.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the government members. MPP Dixon.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Donna, as we've heard, it has been really difficult getting data about the puppy mills. Are they concentrated in a particular area? Who is doing this, and how

are they getting the dogs out? How are they advertising? How are people finding these dogs?

Ms. Donna Power: Based on the estimate in my mind, I've got about 900 puppy mills. I keep a spreadsheet, which I've had for about 10 years, and as they become known to me, I put them on my spreadsheet, and we investigate them. In regard to that, there are over 350 in the area of Huron; the region of Waterloo; the Perths, which are four counties; Wellington; Dufferin; Grey; Bruce; Oxford. In that concentrated area, there are over 350 mills, and for the vast majority, they are all unlicensed. And when I say "unlicensed"—all pup breeders are unlicensed, but the facility, the actual address, may have a kennel licence, but that does not mean that that breeder has any level of oversight at all.

There is quite a concentration up in the Ottawa Valley and a very large concentration in northern Ontario, north-east of North Bay.

We have traced transportation hubs, if you want to call them—a very large one is in Mount Forest, which is in Wellington North. There are a lot of mills—as I said, around 350—and there are transportation companies that are owned by the millers that will transport the puppies and the breeder dogs to different areas. They think that is a way to keep bloodlines pure and to stop inbreeding. Of course, that is not the case whatsoever. It is a very organized network. This is not run by amateurs. They know exactly what they're doing, exactly who their market is.

We've seen, in the last few years, the introduction of what we call brokers. Brokers are people who will go to a puppy mill, buy an entire litter, take that litter of, say, eight puppies home and then sell it, like it's their own dog that had the litter. They sell on Kijiji and specific platforms just for puppy selling; they buy and sell on Facebook Marketplace, but they pretend this is either "my dog or an oopsie litter." That is so dangerous, because there's zero traceability. If that dog turns out to be sick with something, there is no way to know the origins of that dog and no way to tell other people who have bought that dog, "My dog had parvo."

It's absolutely insane what's going on. This is an organized business.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Donna, can you very briefly sketch out your experience when you try to call the animal welfare inspectors and when you try to act on PAWS? What happens?

Ms. Donna Power: Most of the time, they first of all demand that it's the person themselves who was in a facility. You can't call and say, "I've seen this breeder"—it's got to be first-hand. So what we do is, we call because we go to these places; we go on Kijiji and we pretend that we're buyers, to get our boots in that facility. We will call PAWS and say, "Yes, I was physically there. This is what I saw." Keep in mind, the breeders do not let you see their operation. They have another area set up that looks like—either outside on the grass or in a living room area, but they will not let you see their main operation. Once I've got that, I will call PAWS. They will not give you a reference number. They will not tell you if they're going

or when they're going. If I say, "Can you follow up with me after?" "Nope, we don't do that"—and they'll go back on, "It's privacy laws." That is an insane reason. Privacy laws?

It has been so frustrating. We are not the enemy here. We are trying to do what is right for these animals. We must work together.

1440

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Donna, I'm just going to follow up on that line of questioning. We heard about the Quebec regime, where it seems to be over 50 breeders. These outfits that you've identified and ones that you had pictures from—how many dogs would that outfit have, in your estimation?

Ms. Donna Power: The one in Renfrew county was just over 30 dogs. The one I showed with the mama dog that just had the litter had over 80 dogs. Keep in mind, we don't get to see the main operation; we see a subset. The other one, towards Mount Forest, had over 130 dogs.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So having over 50 dogs is not uncommon? Pamela, I see you with your hand up, so I'm going to go to you next—but Donna, if you can just answer that question for me. It's not uncommon to see these puppy mills having in excess of 50 dogs?

Ms. Donna Power: Not at all. Even in municipalities that have a limit, if they get a kennel licence, they may list no more than 25 dogs; routinely, they're well over the limit.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Pamela, you've been very patient with us. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Pamela Bruce: I just wanted to say something that Donna was touching on, just to piggyback on that—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Ms. Pamela Bruce: Oh, great.

I was with Toronto police for 32 years. We actually did investigations, where motorhomes would be coming into the east end of Toronto, into Oshawa, from up north and Quebec, filled—and I don't mean a few cages; filled to the brim with dogs in cages, meeting owners who thought they were getting a loved pet from some responsible breeder. They were selling 40 to 50 dogs in each motorhome. There were four motorhomes there.

I assist with the Niagara rescue. As Donna said, and it cannot be overstated, when these producers are finished with these poor bitches that are—and if you've seen the photos, they let them loose—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time that we have.

We'll now turn to the official opposition. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Pamela, can you please just finish your thought?

Ms. Pamela Bruce: Donna is correct; when we're dealing with assisting with the rescue groups—I assist with rescue groups for all dogs in Niagara. You see, repeatedly, dogs that are not microchipped, that are in horrific condition. There is a photo of them, of a citizen who thinks they've gotten away from someone's home. It's a dog that clearly was a mother. She's lactating. She's in horrific condition—mastitis, tumours, as Donna said. It's heart-

breaking. None of these dogs are microchipped. None of these dogs are reported.

The dogs that we're seeing—and it's unfortunate, as Donna touched on as well: Because of COVID, people are just giving up and not wanting those dogs.

As a responsible breeder, I feel responsible from their first breath to their last breath. I would help anyone and anybody for these dogs that are in rescue or going to rescue. The problem is, nobody can identify them, as John spoke to, as Donna spoke to and as Ewa spoke to. There's no way to figure out where they come from. There's no responsibility. There has been no care.

I recently did a bogus ad on Kijiji to prove the point, after that meeting with the Solicitor General, and because of our rescue groups. I put up photos of my puppies. I have a litter. I had no intention at all—I didn't put the price. I put up a cute photo, and I've had people asking me to buy the entire litter. It went on and on and on. There were over 800 hits on my puppies that are my heart and soul. People wanted to buy litters. They wanted to ask if I would be prepared to breed. They had no background. They would provide no information. It was very clear where those dogs would be intended to go if I had not done due diligence on that.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much for your full answer. I really appreciate the work that you've done.

I think that we all want to see bad actors—and it seems to me that there is a proliferation of bad actors. There are not just a few bad apples, as they like to describe it. This is a criminal operation. It's beyond just the fact that this is someone or a few individuals creating a little bit of money on the side—this is big business.

Yet, when it comes to accountability and transparency, an earlier speaker, Camille Labchuk from Animal Justice Canada, was citing that FOI requests to the ministry around this matter have gone unanswered. This is not just one FOI request; it's multiple FOI requests.

With respect to anyone else on the screen here—Humane Initiative as well as HSI/Canada, or even the kennel club—have you folks tried to get information from the government, and has it been forthcoming?

Ms. Donna Power: I definitely have. Actually, I've got two FOIs pending right now with the government, and they've been extended three times, so I'm over nine months waiting for any information—very basic information. One was the statistical information that the OSPCA released every single year. This government has yet to release statistics, so I filed an FOI. I also filed an FOI in regard to do they pre-announce their arrival at puppy mills? Do they call and say, "We're coming"? Nothing back. It has been over nine months.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you for that.

To Humane Society International: Has getting information from the government been easier for you?

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: No, but I wouldn't say we submitted FOI requests. But I would like to comment on this—that breeding dogs should not be something that it's so difficult to get information on. People love dogs; 50%

of households have companion animals at home. This information should be accessible to the public very easily—to know where their animals come from and what kind of conditions they were bred in. Are inspections being done regularly by the authorities in commercial breeding facilities? Were there any bad actors that were shut down? I think this should be available very easily for the public to know. It shouldn't be accessible only if there is an advocacy group that's working on this full-time, that has the time to fill out an access-to-information request that gets this information.

I would refer back to the model in Quebec. There is a list of establishments that are licensed here in Quebec that's accessible just by a click, going online and seeing if their permit is still valid and if they're allowed to operate.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I just want to pivot a little bit. Simply because we're still on the topic around accessibility and transparency, I'm hoping that you could provide some answers about whether or not you believe Ontarians are getting good value for their money, for the \$21 million that is sitting in the PAWS bank accounts on behalf of all of us as taxpayers. They're doing this work on our behalf. Is there any benefit to having an annual report, with them releasing the data in a more open data format, but also ensuring that that data is going to be up to date always so that we can see exactly how many charges are laid, how many cases are prosecuted, how many mills are shut down, how many animals are rescued or put down, whatever that looks like? Would that be helpful?

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: Yes, of course.

Ms. Donna Power: Absolutely.

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: I don't know if the question was for me or someone else, but I'll quickly just—

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Well, we'll start with you. Go ahead.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Ms. Ewa Demianowicz: One of the issues that we're working on here in Quebec is how enforcement is being conducted. That's one of the issues—what is the will of the government in terms of applying the law? We have the law, we have the ability to work on the ground and apply it, but is it being done, and what kind of action are we taking? Is there a will to shut down these places, or are they just working with the breeders to make them compliant and waiting for years and years for them to comply, and in the meantime, hundreds of dogs are suffering?

I think having transparency on how inspectors are acting when there's non-compliance, when infractions are happening is very important and would certainly be welcomed by the public and groups like ours.

1450

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Fantastic.

I think there might just be 20 seconds left for the two other individuals to answer—or three, including our gentleman friend here in the room—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): That's all the time that we have.

We'll now turn to the independent member. You may begin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to go back to Mr. Atkinson. I didn't tell you: I'm a German shepherd kind of guy. I had one for over 16 years. Jake has been gone for 12 years now, and I still miss him like he was just here yesterday. They are a part of your family.

I think what we want to make sure here is that we get that portion of it right. What I hear around the table and from all the presenters who come here is that the intent is right, as far as what we're doing—the idea is in the right way.

With the kennel association, you have policies, you have memberships, you have processes, you have accountability, you have assurances. You have actually developed it right.

If there is a recommendation, a list of absolute priorities to getting this bill right—not just with intent, but actually getting this bill right—what would you recommend to this government to get it right?

Mr. John Atkinson: I can weigh in, and then I would invite my colleague Pamela to weigh in.

I talked earlier about mandatory permanent identification. I think that that, along with robust breeding records, or records for breeders, is essential to being able to enforce the kinds of regulations that would be included in the bill.

We think that public education is really important, as well. The public and the puppy-buyers, or the consumers per se in this case, need to understand what a responsible breeder looks like, what questions to ask, what kinds of conditions the puppies that they see come in—although Donna did say sometimes they put on a show. Certainly, that's not the case with our member breeders. We do need to educate the public, in addition to whatever is included in this bill.

The other thing is that there are certain provisions of the bill that actually would be problematic for our breeders, whereby it's a blanket approach because it's trying to address the bad actors—so some nuanced approach to take into consideration some of the things and the good practices that go into breeding, for folks like Pamela and other breeders.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Pamela, do you have anything to add to that?

Ms. Pamela Bruce: Just to piggyback—and Donna touched on it—on the idea of somebody purchasing a puppy: They've started to do it here with the Canadian Kennel Club—and I'm not just talking from a purebred dog perspective. In the United States, with the American Kennel Club, they have a program called Meet the Breeds, at the Javits Center. People go in, and it's unbelievable. New York City opens its doors, and the city is in there in thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people, speaking to responsible breeders, understanding the nuances. Whether, as you said, sir, it's a German shepherd or John with his pugs, or me with the Airedales—whatever it is—they can get the idea of what a purebred dog is.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Ms. Pamela Bruce: I spoke to my vet about this last week: If we could get a bit of teeth—in the fact that every animal was microchipped. They have suitable microchips now that can be done, so that it can be recorded, that it can be traced, and that those animals—we can make sure what

breeder they came from; how many. If somebody has 500 microchips in a year, it's very different to seven dogs in five years, for example, and you see the purpose of that breeder. It also protects the safety of the dogs.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank all the presenters for coming here today and enlightening us on the information.

You were impressive with the amount of data information that you had for us today, Donna. That's quite remarkable—when we have a presenter who has more information than the actual government on this one.

Ms. Donna Power: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): That concludes our public hearings on Bill 159 today. I'd like to thank our presenters for joining us.

As a reminder, the deadline to send in a written submission will be 7 p.m. on Wednesday, May 15, 2024.

The deadline for filing amendments to the bill has been moved, by agreement of the subcommittee on committee business, from Monday, May 20 at 5 p.m. to Tuesday, May 21 at 9 a.m.

SELECTION OF ESTIMATES

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We will now move on to the next item on the agenda, the selection of estimates.

On April 22, 2024, the Lieutenant Governor transmitted to the Legislative Assembly the estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2025.

Pursuant to standing order 62(b), these estimates, upon tabling, are “deemed to be referred to the standing committees to which the respective ministries and offices were assigned pursuant to standing order 113(b).”

All committee members should have received an electronic copy of the 2024-25 estimates from the Clerk.

The estimates for the following ministries have been referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy for selection and consideration:

- Ministry of the Attorney General;
- Ministry of Francophone Affairs;
- Ministry of Indigenous Affairs;
- Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery;
- Ministry of the Solicitor General.

The objective of today's meeting is to select the estimates of certain ministries for review by the committee.

Standing order 63 sets out the process by which the committee makes its selections. Each of the recognized parties on the committee shall select the estimates of up to one ministry in each turn. The official opposition selects first, followed by the government.

If members of one party decline to make a selection, the selection then passes to the next party in the rotation. The process concludes when either there are no further ministries available to select, or if both recognized parties decline to make any, or any further, selections.

Pursuant to standing order 63(c), these selections are to be reviewed in the order that they were chosen; however, this order may be altered by unanimous agreement of the

subcommittee on committee business, or by order of the House.

Pursuant to standing order 63(d), the time for the consideration of the estimates of each ministry shall be determined by the respective committee.

The estimates of those ministries not selected for consideration will be deemed to have been passed by the committee. As Chair, I will report those unselected estimates back to the House, and they will be deemed to be adopted and concurred in by the House.

If supplementary estimates are tabled for any of the selected ministries, those supplementary estimates would be considered by the committee during the same time which the committee decides to allocate for consideration of the main estimates for those corresponding ministries.

In accordance with standing order 66(a), the committee must present a report to the House with respect to the estimates it selected and considered by the third Thursday of November of this year. If the committee fails to report by the third Thursday in November, the estimates and supplementary estimates before the committee will be deemed to be passed by the committee and deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

When making your selections, I would also like to add that—if members could also please look at the list of ministries provided and give the correct names of the ministries when they select them for consideration.

Do members have any questions before we begin?

I'll start with the official opposition for their first selection. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: At this point—just to clarify, Chair, before we begin—we're just simply naming the ministries?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I would like to select the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Next is the government for their first selection. MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: We propose the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Next is the official opposition. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I would like to submit that we bring forward the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Next is the government. Any further selections? MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: We propose the Ministry of Francophone Affairs.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Next is the official opposition. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'd like to submit the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): All ministries have been selected. I would like to thank the committee for their selections.

Is there any other business? MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I move that the committee enter closed session for the purposes of organizing committee business.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Saunderson has moved a motion. Is there any debate? Seeing none, are members prepared to vote? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed? I declare the motion carried.

We will now move into closed session, and we'll take a brief recess—a couple of minutes—just to get the room prepared.

The committee recessed at 1502 and later continued in closed session.

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