

LETTER TO THE EDITOR TOOLKIT

Think of your LTE like a short story: it should have a beginning, middle, and end.

BEGINNING

State your **premise and reasoning** in the first sentence of your LTE. This opening sentence can also act as a summary.

For example, "Congress must pass Goldie's Act to help protect dogs and puppies suffering in puppy mills."

MIDDLE

Describe the **issue** and provide compelling facts to support your position.

- **Example:** "I urge my legislators, Representative [First Name, Last Name] and Senators [First Name, Last Name] and [First Name, Last Name], to cosponsor and pass Goldie's Act (H.R.1788) to protect vulnerable dogs and puppies."
- **Example:** "I urge my legislators, Representative [First Name, Last Name] and Senators [First Name, Last Name] and [First Name, Last Name], to cosponsor and pass Goldie's Act (H.R.1788) to ensure that no more dogs suffer the same terrible fate as Goldie."

END

Restate your premise and **make your main ask.**

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR LTE

1 Check the length requirement

Most publications require letters to be between 200 and 300 words, so it's best to keep the LTE short and focused on your key points.

2 Include the full name of the legislation and bill number

Every federal bill is introduced in either the House of Representatives, Senate, or both. Each bill is assigned a unique number in each chamber where it has been introduced, (e.g., Goldie's Act is H.R.1788 in the House).

3 Choose a theme

Capturing everything you want to say in just a few hundred words can be challenging. Focusing your LTE on just one aspect of the issue or one example can help keep your LTE concise and within an outlet's word limit. A number of high-profile cases involving puppy mills can be found below.

4 Mention your legislators by name

Most federal legislators monitor news coverage in which their names appear. If you want your legislator to see your LTE, make sure you mention them by name!

5 Increase your chances of publication

Referencing an article that recently appeared in the paper increases your chances of having your letter published, even if the connection is tenuous.

- Reference the date and title of the article you are responding to (if applicable).
- Make your letter timely by linking it to official or unofficial holidays (e.g., "National Dog Day") or seasonal connections (e.g., "It's summer, and people are spending more time outside with their pets" when discussing companion animal legislation).

TIPS FOR SUBMITTING YOUR LTE

Make sure to include all required personal details outlined on the publication's website.

- Note your professional title/affiliation, if applicable.
- Highlight relevant personal and professional connections (if you work at shelter, rescued a puppy mill dog, etc.)

Submit your letter using the online form (if they have one) and via email. Don't be afraid to follow up with the outlet via email.

Submit your LTE to a newspaper that covers the town/city, county, state or region that you live in.

- Most newspapers will only publish LTEs from residents of the area that the newspaper covers.
- If you're not familiar with a publication in your area, search for one on Google!
- You may be more likely to succeed in getting your letter published if you submit it to a smaller, more local publication. If you do not hear back from the outlet after following up, try submitting your letter to a different outlet.

What are puppy mills and why are they bad for animals?

What does the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have to do with it?

- **What is a puppy mill?** Puppy mills are commercial dog-breeding facilities that make money by producing large numbers of puppies as quickly as possible, breeding dogs over and over in cruel conditions. These facilities prioritize profit over the welfare of the dogs.
- **Where do the puppies go?** The puppies are shipped to pet stores across the country where they are sold to the public. Some may also be sold online and shipped directly to consumers.
- **Isn't the government responsible for making sure that dogs in puppy mills aren't being horribly abused?** Yes. Federal law requires certain businesses, including commercial dog breeders (i.e., puppy mills), to meet minimal animal care standards found in the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The USDA is responsible for licensing and inspecting these businesses to ensure they comply with law. Unfortunately, the USDA has continually failed to enforce these minimal requirements, regularly allowing breeders to repeatedly violate the law with virtually zero risk that the USDA will shut them down. Thousands of vulnerable dogs and other animals have suffered and died as a result.
 - Read more about federal standards and USDA licensing [here](#).
- **What is Goldie's Act?** Goldie's Act is a federal bill named in honor of Goldie, a Golden Retriever who suffered and died at a [USDA-licensed puppy mill in Iowa](#). The USDA watched as Goldie and hundreds of other dogs languished for months in enclosures overrun with vermin and feces and without adequate food, water, or veterinary care. Rather than intervene, the USDA did nothing, allowing Goldie to die in horrendous conditions. Goldie's Act would force the USDA to do its job by requiring the agency to:
 - Conduct more frequent and meaningful inspections;
 - Confiscate animals who are suffering at facilities;
 - Impose deterring monetary penalties for AWA violations; and
 - Share inspection information in a timely manner with local law enforcement.

SUGGESTED LANGUAGE

Use these examples of published LTEs on Goldie's Act for inspiration!

Feel free to use these key messages and supportive talking points. Just make sure to put the language into your own words and use these suggestions as inspiration.

KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ **Dogs in puppy mills are kept in cruel and inhumane conditions.** Cruel commercial breeders want to maximize profit by producing the highest number of puppies at the lowest possible cost. They do that by keeping dogs in tiny, filthy cages and neglecting to provide them with adequate veterinary care, grooming, or socialization. Female dogs are bred at every opportunity with little or no recovery in between litters, even if they are sick, injured, or exhausted. Puppies are typically separated from their mothers and littermates too early and abruptly, which can lead to fear, anxiety, and other lasting behavioral or medical problems. The puppies are then often shipped long distances in swelteringly hot or freezing cold, noisy, crowded, and filthy trucks or planes. No effort is made to find homes for adult dogs who can no longer breed, and when their bodies are so depleted or sick that they can no longer produce puppies, they're often abandoned or killed.
 - Click [here](#) for a more detailed description of the cruel conditions commonly found in puppy mills.
- ▶ **For decades, the USDA has failed to enforce the Animal Welfare Act.** The USDA's animal care program is plagued by poor enforcement. It operates under policies designed to cater to its licensees rather than the animals it has an obligation to protect. USDA employees regularly observe sick and injured dogs, dogs living in cages too small to turn around, dogs standing in waste, and dogs suffering outside in freezing temperatures or searing heat, but they often choose not to take any action to protect these animals.
 - Despite witnessing overwhelming evidence of cruelty and documenting hundreds of violations on inspection reports—including dead dogs and dogs suffering from injuries and illnesses—the USDA has not revoked a license or confiscated a dog from a dog-breeding facility in the last five years. In [Fiscal Year 2022](#), the USDA recorded over 800 violations of care by dog dealers; an unknown number were observed but unreported. Nevertheless, not a single dog breeder was suspended or paid a dime in penalties, and not one dog was confiscated from a USDA-licensed facility.
- ▶ **Hundreds of thousands of animals are suffering under the USDA's watch.** There are over 2,000 USDA-licensed puppy mills that house about a quarter of a million dogs and puppies across the country. If the USDA is unable or unwilling to reform its broken policies, Congress must step in to ensure the humane treatment of dogs in puppy mills.
- ▶ **Goldie's Act is an urgently needed reform that will ensure the USDA fulfills its legal obligation of protecting animals in commercial facilities.**

Cases to Reference in Your LTE

Daniel Gingerich (Iowa): In 2019, Daniel Gingerich received a license from the USDA to commercially breed dogs. The USDA attempted to inspect the facility on three separate occasions in 2020, but Gingerich did not provide access to his facility at any of those times.

Making facilities available for inspection is a requirement for maintaining a license. However, evading inspections did not result in any action by the USDA, which renewed Gingerich's license for another year.

Eventually, when the USDA finally accessed Gingerich's property in early 2021, he admitted to the USDA to unlawfully buying and selling dogs he did not breed and keeping dogs at other locations (family members' homes) where he was not approved to operate. Rather than taking action against Gingerich for repeated unlicensed and illegal activity, the USDA simply added the new locations to his commercial breeding license, despite inspectors observing many Animal Welfare Act violations at each location. This pattern continued throughout 2021: Gingerich unlawfully hid dogs from the USDA and the agency took no action against him, instead directing him to add the unapproved facilities to his license. By August 2021, the USDA had approved multiple "new sites" and knew about many others.

- Throughout this time, Gingerich was continually increasing his inventory of dogs. In April of 2021, he housed 300 dogs on one site; by July of the same year, he had 600. The USDA continued to document severe violations at each of his locations, which Gingerich failed to correct. Some violations included dogs in enclosures with wastewater draining into them, severely matted dogs, and dogs in cages too small for them to sit, stand and lie down in a normal manner. Inspectors also found dead and decomposing dogs on the property, dogs who appeared to be starving, dogs with untreated injuries and dogs panting in cages without relief from heat. **Goldie—known only as Golden Retriever #142—was one of those dogs. The USDA took note of Goldie's deteriorating condition over the course of several months, but never recorded her poor state as a welfare violation, nor did they step in to help her. In late July, Goldie was found in a barn surrounded by dead dogs and no access to water, despite the summer heat. She had pressure sores on her body and her bones protruded. According to state reports, a veterinarian was called, she was humanely euthanized.**

Documentation shows that, over the course of eight months, thousands of dogs were bred, bought, and auctioned or sold to pet stores or brokers by Gingerich—one single licensee of the USDA. Dogs were sick and dying under the USDA's watch. One Poodle puppy died right in front of an inspector's eyes. Despite these clear violations of the law, the USDA stood by and did nothing.

After many demands from the ASPCA, lawmakers and the public, the agency finally suspended Gingerich's license for 21 days in September 2021. Weeks later, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), without involvement of the USDA, filed a complaint detailing the horrific conditions at multiple locations in Iowa where Gingerich kept dogs.

The DOJ negotiated the surrender of more than 500 dogs who were on Gingerich's properties, and Gingerich agreed to cancel his USDA license. The USDA assessed a \$500,000 penalty against Gingerich, but once the dogs were surrendered, the USDA canceled the fine.

Separately, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office pursued criminal charges against Daniel Gingerich. Gingerich pled guilty to two counts of animal neglect. One count of animal neglect against Gingerich was in reference to Goldie the Golden Retriever, who died on the property after enduring prolonged and extreme suffering. According to the plea agreement, Gingerich was sentenced to 30 days in jail and two years of supervised probation. To this day, however, the USDA has not collected a single penalty against Gingerich, and they continue to allow his to operate commercial breeding facilities in Iowa.

Cases to Reference in Your LTE

Envigo RMS, LLC (Virginia): Envigo RMS, LLC is an animal-breeding and research company licensed by the USDA. Until recently, Envigo owned and operated a mass dog-breeding facility in Cumberland County, Virginia, that supplied thousands of dogs for experimentation. Between July 2021 and May 2022, Envigo's Virginia facility amassed over 70 citations for violations of the AWA. Despite these violations, which included horrific cruelty and neglect, the USDA failed to take any meaningful action to stop Envigo from mistreating the animals in its care. In May 2022, the Inspector General for the USDA and other law enforcement agencies executed a federal search warrant and seized 145 dogs and puppies in "acute distress" from the facility. The DOJ also [filed a complaint](#) against Envigo, which detailed the horrific conditions and mistreatment of dogs at the Virginia facility and contained references to documentation of starving, ill, injured, dead, and dying dogs. Facing legal action from the DOJ, Envigo agreed to surrender roughly 4,000 Beagles and cease operations at the Virginia facility in July 2022. Animal welfare groups placed the Beagles at shelters and rescues throughout the country.

Despite all of this, Envigo applied to renew its license to breed and sell animals just a few months later, and the USDA approved the application in less than two weeks' time. Though the Virginia facility was shuttered, Envigo remains licensed by the USDA today. Envigo and its parent company, Inotiv, continue to house tens of thousands of animals at facilities throughout the country.

In early March 2023 Reuters published a [groundbreaking exposé](#) on the USDA's mismanagement of the Envigo case. It revealed that the USDA not only failed to intervene, but that senior USDA leaders went to great lengths to cover up both Envigo's mistreatment of the dogs and their own refusal to protect the animals. Reuters found that:

- USDA inspectors were directed to delete 80 pages of critical content from their reports.
- The USDA denied additional personnel to support inspections.
- The team leader was removed without explanation.

In an unprecedented move, the DOJ subpoenaed two USDA senior leaders before a grand jury to answer for their role in the continued suffering and death of thousands of Beagles, and why they took no action to intervene. Shortly after, one of those leaders announced their plan to step down from the agency.

Henry Sommers (Iowa): In documentation, including photographs and video obtained from the USDA and Iowa Department of Agriculture via a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, the ASPCA discovered shocking conditions at an Iowa puppy mill owned by Henry Sommers:

- Lack of veterinary care: Reports from September 2014 through August 2022 detail consistent failure to seek medical treatment for dogs with dental disease and eye wounds. Many violations were labeled as direct or critical, which are considered serious or life-threatening.
- Possession of controlled substances: Documents show Sommers possessed controlled substances at his facility that he used to sedate or euthanize dogs. He was conducting euthanasia himself without the authorization or recommendation of a veterinarian. Reports suggest he may be killing his dogs in a manner likely to inflict prolonged and painful death.
- Repeat violations for inadequate and dangerous housing: Dogs were kept in enclosures that were too small, had exposed, pointed wires and flooring that allows dogs' feet to be trapped. Sommers has been repeatedly cited for failing to maintain a sanitary environment, with inspectors noting the strong smell of waste and lack of ventilation.

Despite this horrific track record, Sommers remains in business, breeding and shipping puppies to pet stores across the country.

Cases to Reference in Your LTE

Steve Kruse (Iowa): Steve Kruse is no stranger to the puppy mill industry. Over the past 30 years, he has built a massive business breeding and brokering dogs. Despite a [long and troubled history of animal care violations](#), the USDA continues to unquestioningly renew Kruse's license to keep and sell dogs.

Over the past two years, disturbing information has come to light about Kruse, as well as his relationship with the USDA and other dog breeders in Iowa. The ASPCA learned through public records requests that Kruse owns and operates multiple commercial dog-breeding facilities in Iowa, and the USDA allows those facilities to be licensed under other breeders' names.

One breeder who operated a puppy mill under this arrangement with Kruse is the notorious Daniel Gingerich. A portion of Gingerich's commercial breeding business was on a property owned by Kruse. Records show that Kruse transferred hundreds of dogs to Gingerich, and when the USDA inspected Gingerich's facility on that property in July 2021, they had more than enough evidence to confiscate the dogs and revoke Gingerich's license for violations of the AWA. Instead, the USDA agreed for the dogs to be returned to Kruse, even though he had years of documented violations of his own.

Public records obtained from the USDA in February revealed that just a few days after the dogs were transferred back to Kruse, [199 were "euthanized" by his veterinarian in a single day](#) despite an inspection only four days earlier, at which time no widespread disease concerns among the population were documented.

The USDA temporarily suspended Steve Kruse's license for 21 days at the end of March 2023. Despite the suspension and a recent inspection documenting numerous dogs suffering from painful, untreated health conditions, there are no reports showing that the USDA removed any dogs from Kruse's care and no record of the USDA inspecting Kruse's dogs after issuing the 21-day suspension. The suspension lifted on May 1st, and Steve Kruse continues to be licensed under the USDA to broker dogs without any restrictions.

