



# Safeguarding Animals Through Public Policy: ASPCA Priorities

**The mission of the ASPCA is to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States.** For more than 150 years, we've been on the frontlines to save, transform and protect millions of lives in the fight against animal cruelty, revolutionizing the way society cares for animals. As the nation's first and leading animal welfare organization, we are the voice for millions of animals across the country, and our commitment to eliminating animal cruelty is unwavering.

In order for animals to live good lives, they must be valued by society, protected by its laws and free from cruelty, pain and suffering. This is achievable, but only by pragmatically confronting the evolving challenges faced by dogs, cats, horses and farm animals in modern society. Billions of animals remain vulnerable during disasters, lack access to veterinary care, are without homes, or live in conditions that jeopardize their welfare.

At both state and federal levels, laws must not only protect animals from cruelty, but also strengthen communities, support public health and nurture the human-animal bond. Our legal system must also provide civil and criminal remedies, where appropriate, and our government officials must provide rigorous enforcement and oversight.

Together, through collaborative advocacy and decisive action, we can build a safer, better world for animals and the people who care for them.

**Explore six key policy areas that lawmakers should champion to protect animals and benefit their communities:**

[\*Ending the Commercial Abuse of Dogs >\*](#)

[\*Improving Enforcement of Animal Cruelty Laws >\*](#)

[\*Providing Care and Critical Resources for Pets >\*](#)

[\*Preventing Cruelty to Horses >\*](#)

[\*Building a More Humane Farming System >\*](#)

[\*Ensuring Disaster Preparedness >\*](#)

# Ending the Commercial Abuse of Dogs

Countless dogs are bred for profit and kept in inhumane conditions to keep the puppy industry in business. The ASPCA fights to end the cruel treatment of dogs in commercial breeding facilities (puppy mills), which supply pet stores and online marketplaces through a “puppy mill pipeline” that also involves dog brokers, auctions and transporters.

- **Protecting Dogs Used in Commercial Breeding:** End the cruel treatment of dogs in puppy mills and strengthen enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act to ensure those who harm dogs are held accountable. [Learn More >](#)
- **Ending Retail Puppy Sales:** Support policies that end the sale of cruelly bred puppies in retail pet stores and online marketplaces, as well as end the practices of puppy brokers, which partner with puppy mills as a middleman to supply retail sellers.

The ASPCA works toward reforming the inherently cruel commercial puppy industry, which deceives the public about its practices and routinely opposes enforcement efforts (we do not oppose responsible breeding). Americans overwhelmingly support stronger federal and state laws to fix this broken system. Eliminating the worst offenders will reduce costly criminal interventions and ease the strain on local governments, law enforcement, shelters and rescue groups.

*“Shelters like ours work with law enforcement on cruelty, hoarding and puppy mill cases, and we are often tasked with cleaning up the USDA's mess when they fail to protect dogs in commercial breeding facilities. Like other shelters, ours deals with a large population of homeless pets, and animals from these cases present unique challenges given their severe medical and behavioral issues and the costs associated with those. A new approach of stopping bad breeders before animals suffer and removing them from harm's way is long overdue.”*

**– Tom Colvin, CEO of the Animal Rescue League of Iowa**

# Improving Enforcement of Animal Cruelty Laws

Despite longstanding anti-cruelty laws, countless animals still endure violence, abuse and exploitation. While progress has been made, the ASPCA continues to work with policymakers and law enforcement agencies to promote stronger laws and enforcement.

- **Ending Dogfighting:** Support for robust enforcement of state and federal laws prohibiting this bloodsport, where dogs live their lives on chains and are forced to fight to the death, and which often is associated with other violent crimes.
- **Establishing Remedies for Victims of Cruelty:** Support the passage and use of civil mechanisms that reduce the length of time dogs and other victims of animal cruelty must be held in government custody during criminal prosecutions, and provide alternative legal interventions when animals are in jeopardy.

Strong animal cruelty laws protect communities and promote public safety by preventing further violence — including violence against people — and severing links to other criminal activity. When cruelty does occur, earlier intervention hastens recovery for animals and lessens the burden on government agencies, including law enforcement.

*“Despite being a felony nationwide, the cruel bloodsport of dogfighting still occurs all over the country, undermining the safety of our communities and impacting thousands of vulnerable animals at any given moment. Law-abiding citizens do not find amusement or profit in the ill treatment of animals. SLED is committed to working with our local, state and federal partners to combat dogfighting and seek justice for dogs.”*

**- Chief Mark Keel, South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED)**

# Providing Care and Critical Resources for Pets

The ASPCA advocates for keeping pets in loving homes whenever possible by working toward public policies that help pets receive medical care when needed, decrease discriminatory obstacles to housing, and support shelters in providing high-quality care to animals.

- **Expanding Access to Veterinary Services:** Modernize statutes to empower veterinarians to establish a client/patient relationship virtually and streamline the process for veterinarians in good standing to become licensed in another state. Empower licensed veterinarians to delegate and oversee an expanded range of duties to veterinary technicians and technologists under their supervision. [Learn More >](#)
- **Reducing Housing Barriers for Pets:** Eliminate excessive housing fees charged to pet owners, bar insurance companies from discriminating against certain dog breeds, ensure taxpayer-financed housing is pet-friendly, and establish public grants to modernize homeless shelters to accommodate unhoused individuals with pets. [Learn More >](#)
- **Establishing Reliable Shelter Funding:** Establish state and federal funding streams that support critical updates to animal-shelter infrastructure in communities across the country and provide greater access to spay/neuter and vaccine services.

Unfortunately, Americans are too often forced to surrender their pets due to lack of access to basic veterinary care or affordable housing that allows pets. This is a tragedy multiplied: It has a legitimate human impact and contributes to animal homelessness, adding to the ongoing capacity challenges faced by animal shelters across the country. By improving access to pet-friendly housing and veterinary services, and reducing stress on animal shelters, our government can cultivate healthier, more resilient communities and lower burdens for households across the country.

*“Like much of the country, Colorado residents are struggling to access the care they need for their pets. By increasing access to veterinary care and advocating for pet-friendly housing policies, we can provide more resources for pet owners to help keep pets in loving homes and out of shelters.”*

*– Apryl Steele, President and CEO of Humane Colorado*

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# Preventing Cruelty to Horses

Horses deserve to be treated with care and dignity. The ASPCA's partnerships in the equine world inform our policy goals for horses, which focus on honoring their needs and preventing and addressing systemic abuse.

- **Preventing the Slaughter of Horses:** Strengthen laws to prevent the domestic slaughter of American horses for human consumption and their export for that purpose. [Learn More >](#)
- **Ensuring Wild Horses Are Managed Humanely:** The ASPCA works with industry stakeholders and federal agencies to implement preventative, non-lethal management tools that will protect Western wild horse and burro herds as well as rangelands. [Learn More >](#)

Our equine policy priorities protect not only animals, but taxpayers as well. Ending the slaughter of domestic and wild horses is the more humane, community-friendly and fiscally responsible approach. Americans deserve to have their tax dollars put toward efforts they support, and that does not include the institutionalized killing of our horses.

*“Racing industry groups have demonstrated real leadership in committing resources for aftercare and career transition programs, instituting and enforcing track policies against sale to slaughter, and spearheading state and federal policies prohibiting horse slaughter. These programs are critical, but until the law shuts down the slaughter pipeline itself, no horse, no matter how beloved or decorated, will be truly safe.”*

**– Jim Gagliano, President and COO of The Jockey Club**

# Building a More Humane Farming System

In collaboration with the farmers across this country who share our belief that farm animals deserve care and respect, the ASPCA is working to move our food system away from industrial animal agriculture toward more humane, healthy practices that are better for animals, people and the land.

- **Promoting Higher-Welfare Farming:** Investing in more pasture-based, higher-welfare farming that offers good lives for animals and benefits rural America. [Learn More \[PDF\] >](#)
- **Ending the Cruellest Factory Farming Practices:** Phase out inhumane industrial farming methods — including the extreme confinement of farm animals — that endanger animal welfare, harm nearby communities, and fuel the spread of diseases and antibiotic resistance. [Learn More >](#)

Federal programs spend billions supporting factory farms, offering subsidies, tax breaks and contracts that favor industrial-scale operations over independent, more humane farms. Industrial facilities create pollution, perpetuate animal cruelty and create public health risks — with taxpayers footing the bill to clean up the mess. When it comes to farming, what’s better for animals is better for people, too: Shifting support to more humane, healthy and sustainable farming would save money, protect farmers and better align agriculture policy with American values.

*“Investing in pasture-based, humane agriculture offers huge economic, ecological and food security returns. This way of farming and ranching isn’t a quaint folly — it’s already nourishing communities, regenerating our soil and revitalizing rural America, but we need policies in place to scale and replicate these benefits that will enable all producers to grow together.”*

**– Andrew L. Smith, fourth-generation farmer and co-owner of Smith Brothers’ Ranch in Georgia**

# Ensuring Disaster Preparedness

Disasters and extreme weather events are forcing communities across the country to adopt plans that increase resilience and ensure they can provide resources to families and their pets. The ASPCA advocates for better disaster-preparedness planning because incorporating pets into resilience planning not only saves animals, it also improves public safety outcomes for entire communities.

- **Inclusive Disaster Planning:** Require emergency plans at the state and local levels to account for pets and service animals, including co-located/co-sheltering opportunities, transport and evacuation protocols.
- **Pet-Focused Funding:** Establish grants to help municipalities, veterinary partners and shelters build resilience, stock supplies and train response teams.
- **Rapid Response Coordination:** Ensure federal and state resources are available to support animal evacuations, temporary shelters and relocation efforts.
- **Preparedness Education Campaigns:** Promote awareness around pet disaster-preparedness kits, microchipping, rescue decals and proper identification.

Studies show many people delay or avoid evacuating during disasters because they fear leaving their pets behind, putting themselves, first responders and animals at risk. By planning for pets and appropriately funding related education and infrastructure, communities can reduce these delays and lower emergency response costs — saving taxpayer dollars while saving more lives when disasters strike.

*“What happened in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina forever changed how our country includes animals in disaster plans. We learned that when we protect pets, we protect people. We witnessed so many people risk their own safety rather than abandon their pets, so we’ve learned in those critical moments before and after disaster strikes, it’s essential to have plans in place that preserve families, including beloved companion animals.”*

**– Ana Zorrilla, CEO of the Louisiana SPCA**