

Members of the Montana Legislature,

I am writing to request your careful consideration of HB 439,
A bill to regulate commercial dog breeding facilities in Montana.
The primary sponsor is Margaret McDonald.

I am in favor of mandatory state licensing, inspection, and regulation of commercial dog breeding facilities. My name is Donna Cook. I have owned and operated a dog boarding, grooming and training facility in St. Ignatius, Lake County, MT since 2000. I have worked in various capacities in the pet industry and in Montana Law Enforcement, Animal Control for 19 years.

Kennels
Some time in the summer of 2003 I visited a commercial dog breeding facility that had recently moved to a property near my home. I was given a tour of that facility, LDR Kennels, and was told by the proprietor, Nadine Latzky, that there were 280 breeding dogs on site. I saw two small buildings with wire cages on two levels lining both sides of a center passageway. There were automatic feeders and waterers. The cages were about 30" square and there was a passage door to a covered outdoor cage of the same size. They were made of wire and had washdown trays under them that caught the excrement. I was told that it flowed into a septic system. There was a third building where dogs with puppies were housed and I did not see inside that building. I counted over 15 different small dog breeds and some Border Collies on chains in another area. There were between 2 and 5 dogs in each cage. It was very hot inside the buildings and the odor was very strong. The dogs appeared anxious and I saw dogs with injuries to eyes and one nursing dog with an injury to it's back. My overall impression of the facility was that it was overcrowded, poorly ventilated and that it was automated to the extent that none of the dogs could receive any more than minimal human contact for maintenance care. The only source of exercise available to the dogs was frenetic circling from the indoor cages to the outdoor ones, approximately 60" of wire-floored space. Mrs. Latzky told me that she intended to have 500 breeding dogs within the first year of arriving in Montana.

I provide pet care services to dog owners in Flathead, Lake, Missoula, Ravalli, and Sanders Counties. I may have in my care up to 30 dogs at peak times. Caring for this many dogs takes an average of 10 hours per day with the help of my husband. Dogs require several periods of exercise daily. They need individual housing suited to their size and should be fed portioned rations and monitored to determine how much or little they are eating. Puppies raised to be sold as pets need structured human interaction, training, exercise, and affection. Over the past 10 years I have groomed and boarded pets purchased from the LDR Kennel dog breeders. Some of my clients have reported having to seek veterinary care for these dogs within the first weeks after purchase for intestinal problems, skin problems, eye problems and joint deformities.]

Recent legal interventions in cases of hoarding, transport of animals into Montana under cruel conditions and rescue of dogs suffering neglect and abuse have cost our counties and our State and each of us, dearly. Efforts to address the problems associated with LDR Kennel, the largest commercial kennel in Lake County, have included the County Sheriff, County Health Dept. and the Salish and Kootenai Tribal Council. The cost of instituting regulation of commercial dog breeding in Montana could not exceed the cost of another large litigation. Dogs numbering in the hundreds now languish in crowded conditions at the LDR Kennel and other facilities throughout the state. Their minimal needs are provided by individuals or couples whose failing health alone could precipitate another crisis of care and expense to resolve.

For 16 years I have taught basic obedience classes, trained dogs and educated clients as to responsible pet ownership, pet care and training. Selection of a puppy suitable for family companionship requires knowledge of health, soundness of temperament, socialization and careful handling. This should begin at the breeding facility and, ideally, the breeder is a continuing resource for information and support after the purchase of a pet. My customers have not reported having this support from the LDR Kennel or from Mr. or Mrs. Latzky. Many of the dogs from the commercial facility are resold, given away or taken to the Mission Valley Animal Shelter.

Stewardship of the land and our natural resources is our states rallying call. Please vote to enact a law that will govern the practices of commercial breeding of companion dogs.

Respectfully,



Donna B. Cook
Diamond Dog Enterprises
Owner/Operator

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