

General Information and Background

Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement – Keeping Pennsylvania Safe for Dogs AND Humans

The Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement is responsible for ensuring the welfare of dogs and puppies in licensed kennels. The bureau oversees annual licensure and rabies vaccinations for dogs and regulates activities tied to dogs that district courts have classified as dangerous. **Our state dog wardens:**

- Enforce licensing and rabies laws.
- Seize and detain dogs running at large without an owner.
- Investigate dog bites. Establish and enforce quarantine of dogs.
- Enforce kennel licensing and regulations through at least two annual inspections of every licensed kennel.
- Prosecute dog law violations criminally and civilly.
- Maintain a registry of dogs declared dangerous by a magisterial district judge.
- Conduct inspections to ensure dangerous dog owners are meeting their legal responsibilities.
- Provide educational services about responsibilities of dog ownership.

License Your Dog. It's the law, and it's the best way to bring your pet home if they get lost:

- All dogs must be licensed at point of purchase or adoption (earliest is 8 weeks of age) or by 3 months if no transfer of ownership has occurred. All dogs must have a current annual by Jan. 1 of each year unless the dog has a lifetime license.
- Owners of unlicensed dogs can be cited with a maximum fine of \$500 per dog, plus court costs.
- Dog wardens check neighborhoods to ensure all dogs are licensed. Violators may be fined.
- If your dog gets lost, a current license is the fastest way to get your dog back home instead of ending up in a shelter. Even if your dog has a chip, a license is visible. A chip is not.
- In 2024, only 3% of stray dogs across Pennsylvania could immediately be returned to their owners, and 23% were taken to shelters in other counties, due to lack of shelter space in the county where they were found.
- Licensing fees help the millions of dogs in Pennsylvania by funding the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement's work to uphold animal welfare and public safety standards.
- Purchase a license from your county treasurer or issuing agent.
- An annual license costs \$10.80. Lifetime licenses are available for \$52.80 for dogs with permanent identification like a microchip or tattoo. Senior adults and people with disabilities may be eligible for discounted fees of \$8.80 for an annual license or \$36.80 for a lifetime license.

Pennsylvania's Dog Law Summary:

- Your dog must be under control and supervised at all times. You are responsible for any damages your dog causes on someone else's property.
- It is illegal to mistreat or abuse animals. Report suspected abuse to your local humane organization or police.
- Intentionally poisoning a dog is illegal, whether it is yours or someone else's.
- You may not abandon or attempt to abandon any dog. You could be fined \$1,000 plus court costs.
- Puppies less than eight weeks old cannot be bartered, traded, sold, or transferred.
- You must have a kennel license if you keep, sell, transfer, adopt, or foster at least 26 dogs in a calendar year.
- If your dog attacks or kills a human or domestic animal without provocation, the dog may be considered dangerous. You may face extensive fines and restrictions.

New legal requirements include:

- Kennels selling or offering dogs for sale or adoption are required to provide a dog license application and brochure at time of transfer of ownership.
- Annual registration for harboring a dangerous dog is \$1,000 for any dog deemed dangerous by district courts.
- Owners of dogs that attack again after having been declared dangerous are required to find and pay a kennel to house the dog during court proceedings. This is to ensure the community remains safe until a final determination is made.
- Kennels and shelters that offer dogs for sale or adoption must include their kennel name, kennel address, and kennel license number in all advertisements.
- Kennels selling or adopting dogs at retail to the public are responsible for disclosing breeder information, vaccination and medical documentation, and any known bite attacks to perspective customers.

Pennsylvania's Rabies Law:

Ignoring Pennsylvania's rabies vaccination law can be costly — in more ways than one. Dogs can be exposed to the rabies virus through wild and stray animals, threatening their health and yours.

- Dogs three months or older must have a current rabies vaccination.
- Owners of unvaccinated pets may be fined up to \$300 plus court costs.
- Licensed veterinarians can vaccinate dogs and provide a vaccination certificate.
- Dog wardens perform random checks to ensure rabies vaccinations are current.