

USDA ONCE AGAIN SEEKING TO UNDERMINE THE ANIMAL WELFARE ACT

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the agency responsible for enforcing the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA), has reappointed Ms. Bernadette Juarez to oversee the enforcement of the AWA. This is alarming news and signals a return to the times when the USDA shamelessly took steps to boost the image of puppy mills by covering up violations at these facilities. The USDA previously defended its actions for doing so by arguing that **“we need to enable breeders to sell their dogs to pet stores...citing violations is an impediment to such sales.”**

Ms. Juarez, during her previous tenure at the USDA, dramatically increased efforts to hide violations at puppy mills in order to protect the image of dog breeders and reduce concerns about the widespread cruelty in these operations. She was determined to present the dog breeding industry as idyllic, despite the terrible conditions and neglect of dogs in numerous puppy mills. To conceal violations of federal law requiring the humane treatment of animals, the USDA, under Ms. Juarez’s leadership, blocked public access to inspection reports of licensed breeders and refused to comply with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Subsequently, the Alliance’s Executive Director and its federal lobbyist visited Ms. Juarez at her office in Washington, D.C., to discuss this issue. Bewilderingly, she argued that releasing such inspection reports before a court ruling against the breeder would violate “due process.” Notably, Ms. Juarez is an attorney and would clearly understand the meaning of “due process,” and that it has no relevance to releasing inspection reports for public viewing. She also previously served as a trial attorney in the USDA’s Office of General Counsel. Despite her background, she shamelessly attempted to persuade the Alliance that her refusal to comply with federal law (FOIA) was somehow justified.

During her previous tenure, the USDA also implemented policies to prevent violations from being documented on



Shockingly, Ms. Bernadette Juarez has been reappointed as the USDA Deputy Administrator for Animal Care.

USDA inspection reports. **Most alarmingly, Ms. Juarez directed USDA inspectors to falsify inspection reports, which is a federal crime punishable by up to 5 years in prison.**

In response to the Alliance’s outrage over such misconduct, Ms. Juarez explained that too many violations were being documented on USDA inspection reports detailing breeders’ failure to provide proper veterinary care for their dogs. *She also used this as an excuse to eliminate numerous veterinary care requirements and boasted that now 70% of commercial dog breeders have zero non-compliant items on their inspection reports.*

Although this news is very troubling, rest assured that the Alliance will take decisive action if Ms. Juarez returns to her past malfeasance while once again assuming her role of overseeing the enforcement of the AWA. As you may recall, the Alliance hired its first federal lobbyist, Chris Heyde, several years ago to assist with this effort. Chris did an excellent job lobbying Congress to halt the USDA’s illegal practice of refusing to comply with the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Now, USDA inspection reports are not only available upon request through a formal FOIA request but are also accessible online for anyone to review.

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Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation

MISSION STATEMENT

To advocate for the welfare of animals and to protect companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife from abuse, neglect and inhumane exploitation. We accomplish this by enacting animal welfare laws and by working towards the effective enforcement of all existing animal protection laws and regulations.

FUNDING

The Alliance is a 501 (c) (4) nonprofit animal advocacy organization. The organization depends solely on donations from concerned and compassionate individuals to fund its animal welfare advocacy and legislative efforts. Because of our extensive advocacy work on behalf of animals we are considered a lobbying organization and therefore gifts to the Alliance are not tax-deductible.

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

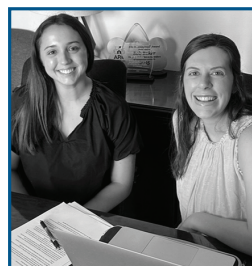


*Bob Baker,
Executive Director*

At the heart of every successful organization are its exceptional people who bring unique skills and talent, but most importantly, a dedication to the cause. The Alliance is now in a transitional stage where we bid a heartfelt farewell to Aislinn McCarthy Sinclair and Tori Cicheler. As they embark on new opportunities to help the animals, we wish to express our deepest gratitude for the impact they have made during their tenure.

In her first year at the Alliance, Aislinn helped pass the Pet Protection Act, which helped not only animals but also victims of domestic abuse. One national organization affirmed that this law “may be the nation’s most comprehensive law allowing courts to include household pets in orders of protection.” Especially noteworthy was her success in creating a coalition of social workers, child protection investigators, children’s advocates, law enforcement, prosecutors, animal control workers, and humane educators to focus on the connection between child abuse and animal abuse in the same home. She was equally successful in establishing an annual “Safer Together” seminar to educate professionals across many fields on the link between crimes against animals and crimes against humans.

We will also greatly miss Tori, who helped raise awareness about animal welfare issues through her remarkable work in the community and on social media. She managed all of our tabling events as well as our successful Pool Paws dog swims and was invaluable in helping to organize and work to make our annual Open Your Heart Gala such a success. She was also ready and available to take on any necessary task the Alliance needed to help the animals, even conducting investigative work to document neglect and abuse of animals.



*Tori and Aislinn
Preparing for Safer
Together Seminar*

As we bid adieu to old friends, we are extremely excited about the future of the Alliance. It is my pleasure to introduce the newest members of our team.



*Joseph DaVault,
Associate
Executive Director*

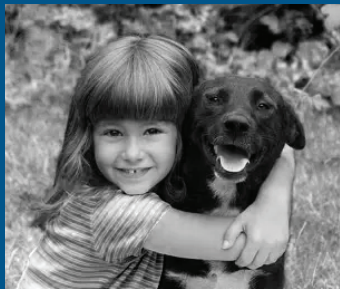
Joseph DaVault is our new Associate Executive Director. Joseph is a strong advocate for animals and has impressive credentials, having earned his Juris Doctor

from St. Louis University Law School. While in law school, Joseph served as the president of the SLU Law Chapter of the Animal Legal Defense Fund and was awarded the 2023 Advancement in Animal Law Scholarship.

Many of you may have already met Joseph, as he attended and lobbied legislators during Humane Days at the Capitol and has attended the Alliance’s OYH Gala for the past few years.

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CROSS-REPORTING KEEPS THEM BOTH SAFE



During the 2025 legislative session, the Alliance achieved unprecedented progress on our cross-reporting bill. This legislation would, for the first time in Missouri's history, create a list of

professionals who would be required to report suspected animal abuse or neglect that they observe in the course of their regular duties. It would also establish a state hotline for reporting animal abuse/neglect. Frequently, human service professionals working on behalf of vulnerable individuals, such as children and the elderly, encounter animals that are being harmed, making this legislation of the utmost importance.

For example, it is not uncommon for a child welfare investigator to visit a child's home and discover animals living in poor conditions. There is also strong evidence connecting physical and sexual violence by the same individuals against both children and animals, making it only logical to have cross-reporting laws. In addition to listing human service professionals who are required to report animal abuse/neglect, our bill adds animal control officers and humane investigators to the list of professionals mandated to report child and elder abuse. This legislation will help save Missouri's most vulnerable people and animals from immense suffering and even death.

During the most recent session, the Alliance's cross-reporting bill was sponsored by four legislators, two from the House and two from the Senate, and had bipartisan support. Representative Holly Jones, who carried HB 1298, was a fearsome advocate for the bill. The Alliance successfully steered the bill to a favorable House committee for consideration, and during the hearing, members of the Child and Animal Neglect and Abuse Coalition (which the Alliance created) presented compelling testimony in support of the bill. So convincing that the Chair of the committee became a co-sponsor of the legislation!

You might be asking yourself: "Who could possibly oppose this commonsense, bipartisan bill?" And the answer would be—the puppy mill industry. As

prosecutors, a humane educator, a social worker, and others testified about how this bill would save lives and improve government efficiency, representatives of the dog breeding industry raised nonsensical concerns about the bill. Most notably, the lobbyist for the Missouri Pet Breeders requested that commercial dog breeders be exempted from the bill. This request seems like an admission that the pet breeding industry believes that their members are not only abusing/neglecting their dogs, but also their children/elders.

We were thrilled that, despite the puppy mill industry's opposition, the cross-reporting bill passed out of committee unanimously with a 9-0 vote. Then, thanks to Representative Jones' resolve, the bill was given floor time in the House as a standalone measure, and it ultimately passed the House with an overwhelming 143-4 vote. The bill was then sent to the Senate's Committee on Agriculture, where the Alliance assembled another strong team to testify in support. Unsurprisingly, the puppy mill industry again mobilized to oppose the bill. Their vigorous opposition and obvious fear of its passage strongly indicate how widespread abuse of both children and dogs is among commercial dog breeders.

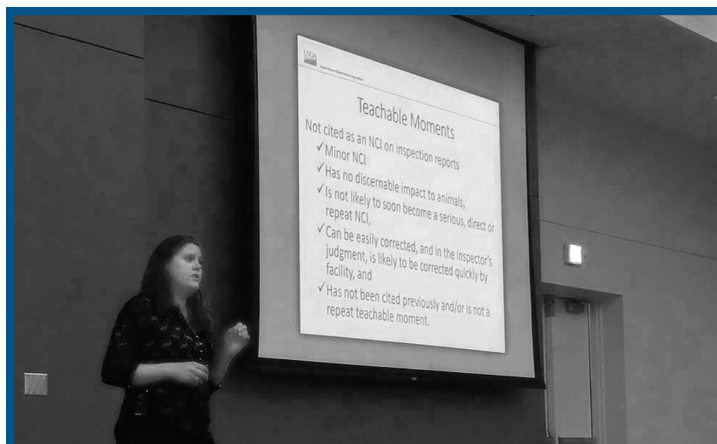
Ultimately, the bill ran out of time in the final weeks of the session, and no vote was taken in the Senate committee. The Alliance will be back and strongly lobby for this bill in the 2026 session. Due to its immense support last session, we expect it to be approved by the committees earlier next session and then move on to the Senate and House floors for a vote, eventually reaching the governor's desk.

You can help us pass this important bill by reaching out to your legislators when it is up for a vote next session, so be on the lookout for our Action Alerts. Also, join us at the Capitol on Humane Day to lobby your legislators in person!



Supporting testimony for the cross-reporting bill came from two prosecutors and advocates from animal welfare and child welfare organizations.

DURING HER PREVIOUS TENURE, MS. JUAREZ IMPLEMENTED NUMEROUS RULES AND POLICES INTENDED TO CONCEAL SUBSTANDARD CONDITIONS AT DOG BREEDING FACILITIES.

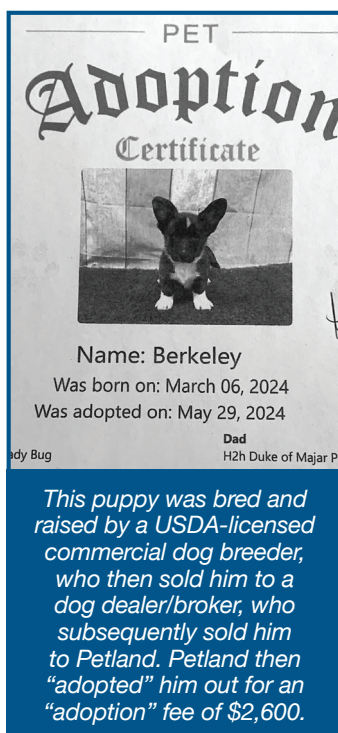


USDA official shares tips with Missouri dog breeders on how to circumvent the Animal Welfare Act under instructions from Deputy Administrator Bernadette Juarez during her previous tenure at Animal Care, USDA.

- **Refused to provide inspection reports of dog breeders to the public as required under the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).**
- **“Teachable Moments”** – Certain violations were no longer documented on inspection reports in order to give the appearance to the public that no violations were discovered during the inspection. However, concealing a material fact on a federal document is a violation of federal law, 18 U.S. Code 1001.
- **Self-Identifying and Self-Reporting** – If the breeder informed the USDA inspector of his/her violations of AWA before the start of the inspection and promised to correct them, the inspector was prohibited from documenting the violations on the inspection report. This again is a serious federal offense.
- **Ignored the federal rule-making process** – implemented regulatory rules on a whim, without going through the requirements of the federal rule-making process and requesting public comment on such proposed regulations.
- **Limited Inspections** – USDA inspectors were only allowed to inspect the dogs and kennel buildings that the breeder agreed to allow USDA to inspect.
- **Proposed Announced Inspections** – Ms. Juarez justified this proposal, arguing that pre-scheduled inspections would reduce violations being documented on inspection reports.
- **Restricted the number of violations inspectors were allowed to cite on inspection reports.**
- **Identification of suffering animals was not required** – The section on how to identify “suffering” animals was removed from the USDA’s Inspection Guide.
- **Veterinarian oversight was no longer required** – the requirement for veterinary oversight was removed from the USDA’s Inspection Guide.
- **Preventive veterinary care was no longer necessary** – the USDA’s Inspection Guide no longer mandated care by a veterinarian for vaccinations and parasite control.
- **Encouraged inspectors to ignore adverse health conditions in dogs** - such as infected or decaying teeth, overgrown toenails curling into the pads, eye and ear infections, and other so-called “minor” illnesses and injuries.
- **Elimination of all incentives for the breeder to provide veterinary care on a continuing basis** – If the inspector was able to contact the breeder’s veterinarian and notify them about sick and injured dogs discovered during the inspection, **then no violation was to be documented on the inspection report, regardless of how much the animals have suffered or how long they have been without treatment. There was also no required follow-up by the USDA to ensure that the breeder’s veterinarian subsequently treated the animals in question.**
- **Inspectors were prohibited from reporting criminal abuse and neglect of dogs discovered during their inspection to the appropriate law enforcement authorities or state department of agriculture.**
- **No unannounced inspection could occur if the breeder objects** – if the breeder refuses an inspection, USDA would schedule an inspection appointment in advance for future inspections.
- **Provided no policy or directive to address conflicts of interest** – One egregious example involved a cruel puppy mill that was repeatedly cited by the Missouri Department of Agriculture (MDA) for serious violations affecting the animals’ welfare. Yet, it was rarely, if ever,

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IS PETLAND A RESCUE OR A RETAIL SELLER OF PUPPIES?



Petland, the only nationwide chain of retail pet stores that still sells puppies, has been using highly deceptive tactics to market their dogs. Some Petland locations now claim they are "adopting" animals instead of "selling" them and give a "Pet Adoption Certificate" to unsuspecting customers who buy puppies costing between \$2,500 and \$5,000.

Such reprehensible sales tactics give prospective buyers a false impression that they are rescuing a dog from an inhumane situation, when in reality they are paying exorbitant prices for a dog from a puppy mill that sustains this industry, constantly

producing puppies for profit, while condemning many more breeding dogs to a lifetime of misery.

Missouri state law (Chapter 273) clearly defines "adopter" as someone who is acquiring a dog or cat from "an animal pound, shelter, humane organization, or animal control agency." In contrast, state law defines a "Pet Shop" as any facility selling animals "for retail sale to the general public."

Missouri defines an "animal shelter" as a facility operated by a non-profit organization "whose primary purpose is to act as an animal rescue, to collect and care for unwanted animals." In no way is Petland an "animal rescue," which is collecting and caring for unwanted animals, especially when they acquire them from dog dealers who obtain them from commercial breeders and then resell them for thousands of dollars.

Petland not only makes questionable claims about "adopting" puppies, but they also frequently source their puppies from disreputable breeders. A recent report by Humane World for Animals shows a link between Petland and puppy mills. Petland stores were connected to at least 25 of the breeders listed in the 2025 Horrible Hundred list, which highlights the worst puppy mills in the country. Some of these 25 breeders included "a puppy mill where inspectors found a shih tzu with seeping wounds, a mill that had its USDA license revoked, and a mill where state inspectors observed underweight dogs with visible spines and pelvic bones."



Most distressing, *Bailing Out Benji*, a puppy mill watchdog group, reported that "63% of the 542 puppy stores that have been tracked over the last three years have purchased puppies from breeders or brokers with known regulatory violations." The list of pet store owners acquiring dogs from breeders with regulatory violations on the state or federal level included all of the Petland stores located in Missouri.

Disgracefully, Petland has frequently been accused of dubious lending practices and even deceptive puppy deposit schemes.

If a potential buyer, for various reasons, is not ready to bring a new pet into their home, they often agree to put a deposit on the puppy they fell in love with to ensure it is not sold to someone else in the meantime. Petland requires a \$799 deposit fee to hold the puppy for the customer. However, when the customer returns to make the final purchase and is informed that their puppy has become ill, they are still expected to buy the sick puppy and cannot apply the deposit toward a healthy one. This is especially problematic for someone who already has pets at home and does not want to bring a diseased animal into their household. Essentially, this forces a consumer to purchase an animal that is ill.

Often, a deposit is required even if the customer plans to make the final purchase on the same day. The salesperson explains that the puppy is not yet available for sale because it hasn't had a veterinarian examination as required by state law. The customer is then encouraged to place a \$799 deposit to secure the puppy's purchase, preventing someone else from buying it before they return after the vet exam is finished. However, if the customer returns to pick up the puppy and the exam reveals the dog is sick, the customer must still purchase the ill puppy and cannot apply the deposit toward a healthy puppy. The only exception is if the puppy is too sick to be left without continuous veterinary care.

It's no surprise that Petland has been attempting to pass a state law in Missouri and numerous other states over the past few years, preventing counties and municipalities from regulating its pet stores for public health reasons, consumer protection, and animal welfare concerns.

OPEN YOUR HEART 2025



The Alliance concluded another fun-filled and inspiring Open Your Heart Gala in 2025. The event's theme, "Meowsquerade" brought together animal advocates from across the state to support the animals and the work of the Alliance.



We extend our warm gratitude to our sponsors, donors, and volunteers for their vital contributions towards making the gala such a glowing success.



Many wore masks and even costumes to celebrate the animals

Save the Date

OPEN YOUR HEART 2026

FEBRUARY 28TH, 2026

We hope you can join us for our upcoming *Open Your Heart Gala* in 2026. It is a great opportunity to help animals and have a great time while doing so.

JOIN US FOR OUR FIFTH ANNUAL SAFER TOGETHER SEMINAR AND OUR FIRST YEAR PARTNERING WITH THE ANIMAL WELFARE INSTITUTE!

This year will be bigger and better than ever. Day One (October 1) features a lineup of all-star speakers who will provide attendees with a foundational understanding of the links between child abuse, animal abuse, and domestic violence. Learn from survivors of domestic violence, a criminologist, a forensic veterinarian, and a prosecutor, among others!

Day Two (October 2) will deepen your knowledge and begins with Missouri's own Representative Holly Jones, followed by an acclaimed detective, a board-certified child abuse pediatrician, and a renowned researcher. You will walk away from Safer Together better equipped to address the link between human and animal abuse and more capable of helping your community prevent violence before it happens.

The connection between child and animal abuse is not make-believe.



**SAFER
TOGETHER**
♥
MISSOURI
October 1-2



For more information and to register, use the QR below to register or visit moanimalalliance.org

Please Register Before September 29

USDA Once Again Seeking to Undermine the Animal Welfare Act continued from page 1

This significantly enhances the transparency of the dog breeding industry, enabling advocates to identify chronically substandard breeders and effectively lobby the USDA and state regulators to pursue legal action against cruel puppy mills. Our federal lobbyist also successfully lobbied the Appropriations Committees of Congress to require the USDA to document all violations of the AWA on the breeders' inspection reports. This halted the USDA's common practice under Ms. Juarez, where USDA personnel would falsify inspection reports by issuing clean reports despite noticeable violations.

The Alliance also succeeded in our lawsuit against the USDA in 2021. As a result, the Agency was compelled

to halt the practice of allowing disreputable breeders to voluntarily self-report violations to the inspector before the start of the inspection, thereby evading citation for AWA violations and the consequences that followed. **We are prepared to pursue legal action and vigorously lobby Congress once again if the USDA, under Ms. Juarez, attempts to revert to its previous practices where the USDA openly violated federal law to shield inhumane dog breeders.**

Please read the entire list of USDA malfeasance while under the purview of Ms. Juarez on page 4 in this Newsletter.

Director's Corner continued from page 2



**Nick Wells,
Policy and
Communications
Coordinator**

We are also excited to welcome Nicholas Wells as our new Outreach and Communications Coordinator. Nick previously served as the Field Director for the Coordinated Campaign in St. Louis County, training dozens of volunteers, managing advocacy events, and developing outreach strategies to engage people across the region. On the policy side, he has served as a legislative intern with the Chair of the St. Louis County Council,

tracking legislation and learning how to effectively advocate for change.

Most importantly, Nick has a personal passion for animal welfare. Nick's work experience and commitment to animals align perfectly with the values of the Alliance and the skills required to effectively advocate for their welfare. He currently has three dogs and two cats in his household.

Joseph and Nick are no doubt a great addition to the Alliance team. And as one who will turn 80 years old next year, we can feel confident that the Alliance will have a promising future and we can look forward to many more achievements for the animals in Missouri for many years to come.

During her previous tenure, Ms. Juarez implemented numerous rules and policies intended to conceal substandard conditions at dog breeding facilities. continued from page 4

- cited by the USDA. The Alliance later discovered that the USDA inspector was dating the breeder's daughter, and they eventually married. When the Alliance raised concerns about this blatant conflict of interest, USDA replied that the Agency had no rule or policy addressing such issues. As a result, the inspector was allowed to continue ignoring violations during inspections of his mother-in-law's facility until the MDA and the state attorney general shut down this cruel puppy mill with over 250 adult dogs.

Please note that the Alliance successfully reversed many of the rules and policy decisions listed above, which Ms. Juarez implemented during her previous tenure as Deputy



Several years later, a USDA official, during a meeting of Missouri dog breeders, expressed regret that the Missouri Alliance for Animal Legislation had blocked the Agency from concealing violations by calling them "teachable moments."

Administrator of Animal Care. Be assured, the Alliance stands ready to vigorously challenge her malfeasance once again if she chooses to continue to protect inhumane puppy mills and ignore her responsibility for effectively enforcing the federal Animal Welfare Act.