July 2, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker United States House of Representatives Minority Leader United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building 2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515 Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader United States Senate Minority Leader United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building 322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510 Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: American Kennel Club – Liability Protection for Non-Profits Adhering to Recommended COVID-19 Health Protocols

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy and Minority Leader Schumer:

I am writing to you today on behalf of the American Kennel Club (AKC), the world’s largest not-for-profit registry of purebred dogs and our more than 5,000 dog clubs in all 50 states. Together with our clubs, the AKC educates the public about purebred dogs as family companions and as working dogs used by our military, police and those with disabilities. The AKC also works to advance canine health and well-being for all dogs and promotes responsible dog ownership. The majority of our activities involve educating the public about responsible dog ownership and sanctioning more than 22,000 canine educational and sporting events annually, with over 3.3 million individual participants in communities across America.

Family-friendly events conducted by AKC dog clubs provide educational opportunities that range from history and historic preservation, to animal husbandry, to leadership and sportsmanship skills for all ages. These events also generate significant economic impact for the communities in which they take place. Typical exhibitors at a dog show or event will spend approximately $685/weekend in communities where the events take place. Nationwide, AKC events have the potential to generate more than $2 billion a year into local economies annually.

Non-profit organizations like AKC, our local clubs, and the communities they serve throughout the U.S. have suffered harsh repercussions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since March more than 11,600 AKC events – more than one-half of our annual events – have been canceled. The cancellation of these events has had a devastating impact on small businesses that rely on AKC events and has deprived thousands of community-based clubs of the funding they require to maintain operations and support critical local functions. For instance, many of our clubs use revenue
derived from AKC events to help provide trained detection K-9s to local law enforcement, to pay for the veterinary care of retired working dogs, to provide dog training and educational programs, and to support critical responsible rescue/shelter, spay and neuter programs. With massive shortfalls in state and local tax revenue forecast due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these local communities need support from local AKC clubs more than ever.

While the vast majority of AKC sanctioned events are canceled for the near future, some AKC outdoor events such as field trials, coursing, and scent competitions are restarting. AKC clubs are eager to resume their events but are concerned that absent passage of legislation providing temporary, targeted liability protection, they may not be able to host events and they could be subjected to COVID-19 related lawsuits and expensive litigation, even if the clubs and events follow all federal, state and local COVID-19 prevention guidelines.

To recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and restore America’s economy, we must put people back to work and resume normal activities as soon as prudently possible. To help ensure the safety of exhibitors and animals at AKC sanctioned events, the AKC has provided our clubs with extensive guidelines to be used in conjunction with CDC, state and local COVID-19 guidelines to follow when hosting events and shows. We join the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in encouraging Congress to enact “temporary liability protections” for businesses and non-profit organizations that work to follow applicable public health guidelines against COVID-19 exposure claims.

Thank you for your consideration and your leadership on this important matter. Should you have questions regarding this vital issue or other matters related to the American Kennel Club, please do not hesitate to contact me or AKC’s Vice President, Government Relations, Sheila Goffe at 919-816-3721 or shg@akc.org

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dennis B Sprung
President & CEO
American Kennel Club

Cc: Senator Lindsey Graham
    Senator John Cornyn
    Senator Dianne Feinstein
    Representative Jerrold Nadler
    Representative Jim Jordan
    U.S. Chamber of Commerce

*Please see attachment for more information about AKC’s educational and charitable activities
(AKC: Above and Beyond)