

How National Breed Clubs Can Influence Local Dog Laws

By Jennifer Clark, Director, Legislative Outreach

As a national breed club, it is natural to focus on the big picture when it comes to your breed and your club members. So why should parent clubs care about what's happening in a local community – and what can you do about it?

The actions of Congress or a state legislature are higher profile and make the news more frequently than local issues, but trends from the last few years reveal that local jurisdictions – cities, counties and towns are where a large proportion of dog laws are actually being implemented.

Proposals at the local level can be considered with very little notice and many have the potential to have a very immediate impact on dog owners, fanciers, and breeders in their jurisdiction. Common local laws include limits on animal ownership, mandatory spay/neuter laws, breed restrictions, and kennel regulations, just to name a few.

This is why it's so important for you – as a parent club consisting of dog lovers, owners and breeders – to encourage your members to cultivate positive relationships with elected officials, especially at the local level, *before an issue arises*. Animal rights activists are very good at communicating with local officials, convincing them of real and perceived animal issues in the community, and providing their ideas on how to fix it. Unfortunately, they hear a lot less from responsible expert owners and breeders. City and county officials need to know that they have expert, responsible dog owners and breeders that are quietly doing positive things for dogs and the community.

In August, AKC Government Relations outlined [Five Things Your Parent Club Can Do to Impact Dog Laws](#). Here are a few more things that parent clubs (and their members) can do to make a positive difference on the local level:

Encourage members to be proactive in local elections. The best way to make a difference is to have lawmakers in place that support responsible dog owners and breeders. Encourage your members to attend town halls and forums to get to know the candidates running for office in their community. You can use [AKC's candidate survey](#) as a guide to ask them specific questions on canine policy. Also encourage them to support the [AKC Political Action Committee \(AKC PAC\)](#), which now supports local candidates as well as state and federal candidates. If your members learn of candidates that are supportive of responsible owners and breeders, encourage them to share that information with local clubs and consider volunteering for the campaign.

In addition, it is very important that club members vote in local elections. Encourage members to consider holding a voter registration drive at local shows and share information on when elections will be held. Check out [AKC GR elections articles](#) for more ideas on how to get involved.

Share a link to AKC's Legislative Action Center on your parent club website. AKC Government

Relations' online Legislative Action Center provides legislative alerts and updates on issues around the country that will impact dog owners. This site also provides sample letters, talking points, and a myriad of other tools designed to help fanciers and dog owners communicate with elected officials. Share our website (www.akcgr.org) on your parent club website and encourage members to visit for the latest information and tools available to protect their rights in their local communities.

Do something positive for the community –and make sure lawmakers hear about it. Local communities need to know that there are good things for dogs happening right in their backyard. Reach out to local officials and invite them to attend your national specialty and be let them know of any positive outreach you may be doing (such as donating money to a local K-9 unit or shelter, etc.)

Likewise, encourage your members to consider do the same at their local shows – and to also publicize any other positive programs (such as CGC testing, outreach to local schools, dog training classes, etc.) they are offering in the community. Unless we let local officials know about the great things that responsible dog owners and breeders are doing to make a positive difference – we can't expect them to know about it. These communications now are a small investment that could have a big payoff in the future when your legislators are asked to consider new dog laws.

Contact AKC GR if you hear of a pending canine legislative issue. If a club member hears about a local issue impacting dogs, encourage them to contact AKC GR. We can help connect them to other local clubs and breeders and provide them with the tools and resources needed to communicate effectively with the city or county. They can reach out to us at doglaw@akc.org or (919) 816-3720.

Parent clubs are in a unique position of being a national organization with club members in communities throughout the country. AKC Government Relations is here as a resource and partner for you and your members to help you protect your rights to own, breed, and show dogs for generations to come.