It’s no secret that the right to own, breed, and care for the dog of your choice is being challenged on a daily basis at the local, state, and federal level throughout the United States. In the first six months of 2017, in our home state of New York, over 140 bills have been introduced that would impact dogs and dog owners. Many of these same bills have also appeared in other cities and states. Some bills propose to restriction of sales and activities of dog breeders, and mandate the source of pets offered for sale in pet shops. Others propose the creation of a mandatory animal abuse registries and increasing the penalty for animal cruelty to a felony. Still other bills wish to restrict dog training and dog grooming. Occasionally, proposed legislation appears satisfactory on the surface, but when carefully reviewed by knowledgeable dog experts, the proposals end up having many unintended consequences impacting both pet owners and businesses. By identifying questionable legislation quickly, then engaging with public officials, legislation can be stopped or, at a minimum, be amended to make it more acceptable. In New York, none of the most restrictive bills have both houses, primarily due to the active lobbying of the state’s Dog Club Federation, as well as scores of concerned citizens personally interacting with their legislators.

So, you ask, “How can I learn what my local issues are, why the proposed laws are problematic, and what can I do about it?” One of the best ways to learn the answers to these questions is to attend a Legislative Conference. At a Legislative Conference, you will:

- Make contact with people that can help you if a bad law comes your way.
- Hear from speakers about trends in canine legislation.
- Share information and the experience of dog owners, club liaisons, and federation experts.
- Gather the latest data and tools to help inform and empower advocates in your state and in your community.
- Discover how to effectively protect the rights of dog owners, exhibitors, and breeders, and how to promote a positive image of dogs in your communities.
- Receive training on how to successfully oppose problematic canine legislation.
- Learn how to counter false information and support positive measures to improve the well-being of dogs.
- Understand the bigger picture, how a small seemingly innocent law has larger ramifications.

The animal rights movement is extremely well organized, using strong campaigns with fancy commercials to raise millions of dollars per year by claiming to be able to solve the plight of all poorly-cared-for dogs for just $19 per month. They use those millions to organize and fund their activities, to pay for lawyers and lobbyists, and to craft legislation with the intent of eliminating all pet ownership and breeding. They use clever phrases like “Adopt don’t shop,” “Don’t breed or buy and let homeless pets die,” and “Adoption is the best option.” They try to shame the general public into buying a dog from a shelter regardless of the best pet option for them or their family.

While our numbers are many, the dog fancy is splintered. Hunters, dog groomers, dog trainers, conformation and performance event exhibitors, farmers with working dogs, and pet store owners, are all fighting the same battle, but without a single organization to bring us all together. Quite simply, if individuals from each activity involving animals do not voluntarily talk to and support each other, nobody else will. Legislative Conferences bring us all together with a common cause. Just by showing up and participating in a conference, you can make a difference. In order to protect your right to own and choose the pet that is right for you and your family, you need to be educated, active, and involved.