



# LINES FROM LINDA

by LINDA AYERS TURNER KNORR

**M**ost serious dog people now know (or should know) that fanciers—and anyone who breeds or shows dogs is smack in the bull's-eye of animal rights (AR) radicals who oppose breeding and ownership of purebred dogs. Some of their most sophisticated attacks come in the form of anti-breeder legislation.

The American Kennel Club's Government Relations Department, led by Sheila Goffe, is a dynamic, close-knit team that works hard day in and day out to fight these attacks and protect our rights to own, breed and preserve the purebred dog. The AKC Board recently appointed Sheila Goffe to Vice President, Government Relations and is signaling a new level of commitment and possible expansion in advocacy to protect responsible breeders and dog owners.

Sheila leads the AKC's efforts in working to protect the rights of all dog owners and promote responsible dog ownership. She oversees AKC legislative policy strategy and AKC outreach at the federal, state and local levels, works with legislators, legislative staff and regulators on key issues in canine policy and supervises the AKC Government Relation team. She also serves as Secretary on the AKC PAC Board of Directors.



(Left to right) Sheila Goffe, VP Government Relations; Phil Guidry, Sr. Policy Analyst; Sarah Sprouse, Legislative Analyst; Jennifer Clark, Manager, Canine Legislation; Melissa Ferrell, Research Analyst and Patty Van Sicklen, Legislative Analyst.

After joining AKC's publications department in 2006, in 2008, she became AKC's Manager of Public Education. Shortly thereafter, she returned to her previous career in public policy and government affairs as AKC's Director of Government Relations. Prior to working for the American Kennel Club, she was a Senior Legislative Analyst/Editor and Deputy Director of Editorial Product Development for Congressional Quarterly in Washington, DC. Previous experience included federal legislative staffing and advocacy, work as an

editor and analyst for *The Economist* Intelligence Unit and serving as an adjunct in Political Science/Comparative Politics at the State University of New York/Stony Brook.

Goffe has completed PhD coursework and research in American Politics/Public Policy, earned a Masters of Philosophy in American Politics and a MA in International Political Economy and Development at Fordham University and is a former Fulbright Scholar, studying Political Economy and Development in Sri Lanka.



## AKC GOVERNMENT RELATIONS TEAM LED BY VICE PRESIDENT SHEILA GOFFE



Sheila Goffe accepting a check for the AKC Canine Legislative Support Fund from the Greenville Kennel Club.



In addition Sheila breeds and shows Siberian Huskies. She is a member of the Siberian Husky Club of America, the Bull Terrier Club of America and several specialty and all-breed kennel clubs.

At the AKC Delegates Forum in June, Sheila Goffe shared the stage with National Animal Interest Alliance founder Patti Strand. Both emphasized the value of the two complementary groups working together on public policy issues. NAIAs strengths tilt towards research and a broader focus on all animals. AKC's focus is on dog issues and working directly with dog owners, clubs and other groups to advocate on legislation that impacts dogs and dog owners.

Here's a look at some the important work the AKC GR team does, why this department is one of the most important and successful at AKC and why all

dog fanciers need to care and pay close attention to legislative issues.

### WHAT DOES AKC GR DO?

Officially, the role of the Government Relations is to monitor and positively impact legislation affecting all dog owners, breeders and exhibitors and to ensure that laws governing dog ownership and breeding are reasonable, enforceable and non-discriminatory. It must also protect AKC as an organization. Goffe says, "The name American Kennel Club conveys a lot of weight and credibility, so we work hard to ensure that AKC's voice in the halls of power is always perceived as a positive voice of reason, expertise and credibility."

### HOW DOES AKC GR DO IT?

"We have an incredibly talented team of six here in North Carolina with

professional backgrounds in law, lobbying, communications and PR, business, journalism, research and public policy. Team responsibilities are broken up by geographic region and specific areas of expertise because activity levels don't break down evenly across regions. In 50 different state legislatures and thousands of cities and counties, team members work very closely together and help each other out across our regions. The group really is like a family—the shortest tenure of a team-member is six years. The rest of us have worked together for eight years."

The major responsibilities of the department's day-to-day activities break down into four key areas:

**1) Advocating for the rights of responsible dog breeders and owners.** AKC GR contacts lawmakers, negotiates bill language, provides sample legislation, holds lobby or educational days, educates officials and the public about sensible dog laws and responsible ownership and provides alternatives to restrictive breeding laws or bans. "A significant portion of this type of work is conducted outside public eye. Some greatest successes are the bills you never hear about, those never formally introduced or don't make it past committees," Goffe shared.

"GR balances this with public advocacy. Public advocacy is most effective when impacted constituents are directly involved. Legislators really do want to hear from their constituents, the people who can control the next election.



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Grassroots advocacy is extremely important. The job of AKC Government Relations is to be a resource for you and your club to help you succeed in advocating for policy that makes sense for your community and impacts your daily life,” Goffe said.

GR Staff can't be everywhere at once and even if they could, that wouldn't be as effective. GR works with local clubs, legislative liaisons and constituents to provide support, training and backup to help them successfully take the lead. Unless people affected by local laws get involved, it's difficult to impact them in the long term.

**2) Monitoring Legislation.** To date in 2016, GR has been monitoring more than 2,100 bills at the state and local level that have the capacity to impact dog owners or canine wellbeing.

The department uses a variety of software programs that help keep tabs on federal and state legislation. Local legislation is much harder to track. AKC GR uses some internet and news searches, but with thousands of communities, this is where the role of club Legislative Liaisons (and anyone else following local issues) can play an important role. Sheila emphasizes, “It's hard to overstate the value of an active legislative liaison who keeps up to date on local issues, is connected in their community and contacts the department when they hear about a potential problem. Far too often, restrictive laws squeeze through in our communities, simply because no one knew or was paying attention.”

Decisions about whether to support, go neutral or oppose an individual legislative proposal are guided by AKC Canine Legislation position statements. One interesting point about AKC positioning is that there are a lot of complaints from Animal Rights groups that “AKC opposes everything.” Goffe says these claims are a long way from the truth. But it does speak to their frustration with AKC's success the department has had in pushing back on bad legislation.

“When we oppose something, it's generally a portion of a measure and we always provide, or offer to help with, alternate solutions. We want to work with communities, understand the issues they face and be part of the solution. AKC, AKC Clubs and members have a tremendous amount of expertise to offer. Anyone can complain, but legislators want solutions—and they generally do listen when you come to the table with a reasonable solution. Time and time again, positive solutions—along with credibility, preparedness and knowledge—have been the key to success for the AKC, clubs and individuals who get involved.”

**3) Educating the public and club members about responsible dog ownership, AKC resources in the community and the threats to dog owner's rights.** The department communicates regularly educate through a large number of resources:

- Two e-newsletters: *Taking Command*, the monthly newsletter for advocates and *In Session*, a periodic policy newsletter, which goes to members of congress and legislators.
- The AKC Legislative Action Center: Microsite [www.akcgr.org](http://www.akcgr.org) was designed by staff last year to make it easier for dog lovers to learn about and advocate on legislation.
- “Key Issues”: Provides easy-to-understand policy explanations and advocacy resources organized by issue, with all your key documents from letters to the editor to talking points and white papers in a single location.
- Government Relations Online Legislative Tracking Tool: Gives everyone tools to easily track canine legislation in all 50 states and Congress; it is updated daily.
- The Government Relations Toolbox: Provides links to all AKC GR's downloadable educational and advocacy resources, including economic

impact information, downloadable videos and presentations, educational materials, position statements and more!

- Legislative Alerts: Online and geo-targeted to clubs and individuals impacted by a proposal.
- High Priority Alerts: Enable concerned constituents to send emails to their legislators in just a few mouse clicks.
- AKC Government Relations Online Toolbox: [www.akc.org/government-relations](http://www.akc.org/government-relations)
- AKC Government Relations Facebook groups and Twitter feed
- The Government Relations blog, videos and op-eds, including the most recent one, published by FoxNews.com on August 28th, 2016.

**4) Provide resources to empower dog owners to defend the right to own and breed dogs in a responsible manner.** AKC GR resources range from one-on-one assistance with legislative issues, educational presentations to clubs and the public, legislative analysis, talking point and testimony on issues, community outreach as well as financial grants for clubs that need assistance in putting on a legislative or educational day.

## TRENDS

Government Relations tracked about 700 bills in 2008. Now they are at more than 2,100 states and federal bills, year to date. Compared to ten years ago, today they are not only seeing more legislation, but more sophisticated legislation. However, they have also been successful in pushing back in a number of states. As a result, where groups



Sheila Goffe with one of her Siberians, Gini.



Georgia US Senator Saxby Chambliss receiving an AKC Legislator of the Year Award.



Arkansas US Representative Rick Crawford with his family as Sheila Goffe presents him with an AKC Legislator of the Year Award.

couldn't get an anti-breeder bill passed at the state level, they're now taking it county to county or city to city. Local involvement has never been more important for dog owners.

There are some other trends such as increasing in Bond for Care and civil forfeiture measures. These bills unfairly require a person whose dogs have been seized on the accusation of cruelty to pay up front for boarding and vet care of the seized animals during the trial. If they are late on a payment, they automatically forfeit the dogs to the state. Even if they are later found not guilty, they have lost their dogs—and in many cases their life savings—simply because someone accused them of a crime and they couldn't afford the cost of boarding their animals and defending themselves. Goffe says, "It's heartbreaking. We've seen measures like this in New Hampshire, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska and other states and many local communities."

In New York alone, the department is seeing an increase in local breeder and pet sales bills resulting from passage of a state bill a couple of years ago that specifically allowed and encouraged local communities to develop animal sales and care laws that were tougher than the state standard.

Measures that are designed to restrict breeders aren't just called breeder regulation. The most common references today use the terms "cruelty" or "puppy mill cruelty", even if they have little to do with either. The title alone is a great example of controlling the conversation—opposing a bill called "puppy mill cruelty" even if it has little to do with that makes you sound like a monster.

In the last year, Goffe has seen more than 50 bills in a few states and local communities that ban pet retailers from selling any pets other than from rescues or shelters. While it may seem like these bills target pet shops only, the real victims are legitimate, regulated breeders and the average pet buyer who could lose the freedom of choice to select a purebred dog.

Goffe expressed, "On a positive note, we're also working on a sizeable number of bills to provide in a variety of areas ranging from prohibitions on breed specific legislation, to helping veterans obtain service dogs, requiring shelters to scan lost pets for microchips before the animal is dispersed, attempts to get at the problem of fake service dogs, reasonable regulations to assure that pet stores only obtain pets from breeders who are in compliance with Federal welfare act standards, federal legislation to provide assistance so that pets can accompany victims of domestic violence to shelters,

federal and state resolutions recognizing breeders and national purebred dog day and others."

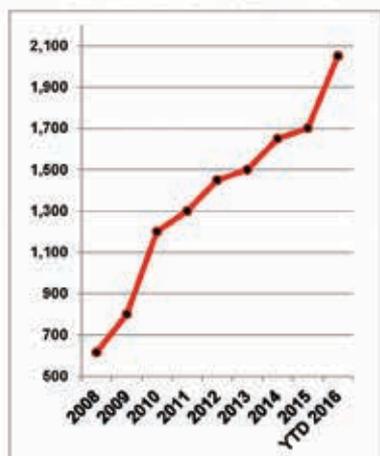
The GC also works with other groups. In addition to working closely with NAIA, the AKC GR works with more than 35 state federations; 1,500 Legislative Liaisons and a variety of other organizations ranging from the AVMA and state VMAs, to the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Cat Fanciers Association, NRA, ACLU, Animal Health Institute, Farm Bureau, US Centers for Disease Control and USDA.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Increasingly sophisticated threats require an increasingly sophisticated response that includes both public outreach and legislature response. It's not enough just to stop bad legislation. If we did just that, we'd still have a vacuum that would be filled by more bad legislation. To achieve the lasting success, we need to also stop the perceptions that belief that such legislation is needed. Our approach moving forward focuses on a combination of continuing to fight back against regressive restriction on animal ownership, more proactive education and involvement, positive legislative action and community outreach. It's more important than ever that the public and legislators recognize that AKC expertise advances dogs and demonstrates on a daily basis that breeders are the true animal experts.

The beauty of this approach is that AKC already has amazing programs that show how we advance the well being of all dogs, of breeders who work with us and communities touched by our programs. We have so much of which

AKC Government Relations Bills Tracked 2008-2016 YTD





(Above) North Carolina Lobby Day: Goffe welcomes Senator Floyd B. McKissick

(Below) Simpsonville, South Carolina City Council Representative Elizabeth Braswell is working with Goffe and our AKC Government Relations team to rewrite Animal Ordinances banning specific breeds.



to be proud. As breeders, we have our beautiful, healthy dogs; we have the history and traditions of our events and we have personal and professional connections in our communities.

As an organization, AKC has unparalleled expertise and is on the side of science and progress. For example:

- Programs like Bred with Heart demonstrate AKC's commitment to raising the bar for breeders through ongoing education, health testing and accountability.
- The compliance inspection program shows our ongoing commitment to

## "AS AN ORGANIZATION, AKC HAS UNPARALLELED EXPERTISE AND IS ON THE SIDE OF SCIENCE AND PROGRESS."



the accuracy of our records and the well being of dogs.

- The Humane Funds offers programs for domestic violence shelters that are a model for new laws that allow victims of violence to seek shelter with the companionship of a pet.
- The Canine Health Foundation has made a \$36M commitment to improving the health of dogs.
- AKC Reunite's relief and outreach programs have provided more than \$6M to communities in need.
- For legislative liaisons and federations that need help with getting any of these messages out, AKC GR is there to help.
- The Canine Legislative Support Fund provides funding for educational and advocacy programs that benefit communities and clubs and work toward the goals of responsible dogs ownership and good canine public policy.
- The AKC Legislative Conference: <http://cdn.akc.org/Enewsletter/TakingCommand-Aug2016.html>

### THE AKC PAC

Reminders are everywhere that this is an election year. Aside from voting, a donation to the AKC PAC (Political Action Committee) is one of the easiest and most effective ways that club members can impact election outcomes for dog-friendly candidates. AKC Political Action is a non-partisan, single-issue political action committee that supports campaigns of dog and breeder-friendly candidates to state and federal offices.

There are two figures people should keep in mind when they think about the AKC PAC. Both are ridiculously high and highlight the investment value of a donation to the PAC:

- The PAC has a 92% success rate in supporting legislators who support our issues and were successful in their last election.
- 100% of the donations made to the PAC go back into campaign

contributions. (This is possible because AKC pays all the administrative costs of the fund. AKC cannot donate to the fund, nor can clubs donate to the fund directly from their treasury. Federal elections law requires that we accept donations only from individual club members. For this reason, we ask clubs to help us in educating and urging their members to support the PAC.)

According to Goffe, "The AKC PAC Board encourages all legislatively active club members to consider recommending candidates for contributions if they have experience with lawmakers who are deserving of a campaign contribution. When the PAC provides a contribution we encourage that person or a Legislative Liaison from the local area to present the check in person at an event or a one-to-one meeting.

"Presenting a check from the PAC, or attending a fund raiser is an excellent way to get access to legislators. Political donations demonstrate that AKC, through our local club members, is serious about supporting legislators who support reasonable dog laws, responsible dog ownership and the rights of responsible dog owners."

Each of us should donate at least the cost of a dog show entry—\$30. Donations can be made online by going to [www.akc.org/pac](http://www.akc.org/pac). Even an ongoing monthly donation of \$5 can make a big difference.

AKC Government Relations launched the new PAC video "Don't Lose What You Love" in May. This video is online and on YouTube and fanciers are encouraged to link to it, share it and ask your club members to stand up and support our efforts stand proud and to take back the conversation.

We all have a role to play on getting the word out, educating our neighbors and our legislators. Our AKC Government Relations is playing a leadership role in making it happen and they need our support! ■