



**2020 BANK OF QUESTIONS ON COMPANION ANIMAL ISSUES:
*Candidates Running for the Georgia State Legislature***

Before you vote, know where candidates stand on companion animal issues. The bank of questions below is intended to help animal advocates ascertain the views of candidates running for the Georgia General Assembly in 2020. Select several questions that are meaningful to you and politely ask candidates their positions via town halls, emails or phone calls. Add your own questions to assess each candidate's awareness of issues impacting your community or organization. Invite other advocates in your area to participate to amplify your influence. Be sure to check the voting records of incumbents at www.GAPets.org.

Your vote is the voice for animals - always remind candidates that you are a humane voter!

- 1. Companion animals such as dogs, cats and horses have a special role in the lives of many Georgians. What role have animals played in your life? Do you currently have any family pets?**
- 2. Have you ever visited a county or private shelter? Describe any experience or volunteer work with shelters and/or rescues.**
- 3. How would you rate the adequacy of companion animal protection laws in Georgia?**
- 4. What issue do you view as the highest priority in our state related to companion animals like dogs, cats, and horses?**
- 5. Are there any animal issues of personal concern to you, including animals other than dogs, cats and horses?**
- 6. How do you weigh or balance companion animal protection issues with other policy issues important to you?**
- 7. What actions have you taken in the past to positively impact the humane treatment and protection of animals? Please include any actions taken as a private citizen or public official.**
- 8. For incumbents. Have you sponsored or co-sponsored any animal-related bills during your tenure in office? Can you tell us about your voting record on animal-related bills during your tenure in office?**
- 9. Would you consider attending a lawmaker forum on companion animal issues, hosted by the greater animal welfare community, prior to the General Assembly convening in 2021?**
- 10. Would you support the formation of a State Task Force on Companion Animal Protection to assess priority issues and identify potential solutions for Georgia's companion animals?**

- 11. Pet Homelessness.** Pet homelessness in Georgia costs local governments, taxpayers and charitable organizations upwards of \$100 million per year to rescue, transport, impound and euthanize thousands of unwanted animals. According to one survey, over 18,000 homeless dogs were transported out of state in 2019 for adoption; yet, Georgia shelters and rescues are still being overwhelmed due to reckless overbreeding by puppy mills, unlicensed backyard breeders and inadvertent breeders. Most causes of pet homelessness are preventable through better policy, education and enforcement. **What initial steps would you take as a policymaker to help fix this problem?**
- 12. Pet Overpopulation.** Pet overpopulation is a multi-faceted problem which includes a lack of access to affordable spay/neuter programs for animals in low income households and rural communities, as well as for animals who are homeless/stray/feral (including free-roaming community cats). A mobile veterinary clinic is one example of an effective way to provide sterilization services and vaccinations to animals in underserved areas. Possible sources of state funding for a mobile unit, in partnership with a private entity, could include (1) the existing revenue from the GDA's sales of license tags, (2) a surcharge from pet food manufacturers on dog/cat food products sold in the state, and (3) a surcharge on rabies vaccinations. **Would you likely support policies that optimize collaboration between the private and public sectors to help deliver affordable sterilization programs to where they are needed most in Georgia?**
- 13. Protecting Local Animal Ordinances.** Since 2017, pet store lobbyists have tried to pass state bills that would overturn (or 'preempt') all local ordinances prohibiting the retail sale of puppies. We believe individual communities should maintain the authority to make decisions regarding local pet overpopulation and risks to public health from puppy mill puppies sold in pet stores. **If elected, would you safeguard local animal ordinances by opposing any state legislation that seeks to nullify them?**
- 14. Puppy Mills.** Puppy mills are large commercial breeders that raise puppies in cramped, neglectful and disease-ridden conditions with little to no vet care. These animals are sold in pet stores or through the internet and often have serious health issues that result in exorbitant expense and heartbreak for Georgia consumers. Several states have enacted statutes that restrict the retail sale of puppies sourced from puppy mills and sold in pet stores. **Would you likely support a state resolution that (1) recognizes the financial, public health and societal costs of puppy mills to citizens and (2) urges the end of retail sales of puppies in Georgia?**
- 15. Puppy Mills.** The recent puppy mill raids in Berriens, Montgomery and Candler counties (2018-2019), involving over 1,100 dogs living in squalor, highlight the tragic consequences of reckless overbreeding and the need for stricter regulations for large commercial breeders. Two bills targeting puppy mills passed the Georgia Senate in 2020 and are awaiting a vote in the House. SB 338 would require a surety for commercial breeders to provide financial assurance in the event of closure, as well as require a criminal background check. SB 476 would require commercial breeders to microchip their dogs to prevent business fraud. **Would you likely support measures like these which make it harder for puppy mills to operate in Georgia, thus reducing the financial burden on local governments, taxpayers and nonprofits for multi-impound cases of animal cruelty?**

SB 338: <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20192020/SB/338>

SB 476: <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20192020/SB/476>

- 16. Commercial Breeding Facilities.** In 2019, the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) made several upgrades to its animal welfare regulations (e.g., prohibiting stacked cages) in response to the notorious puppy mill raids mentioned above. While this is a step in the right direction, more changes are needed to ensure commercially bred dogs are provided with humane standards of care. Examples of additional changes include annual veterinary checks, access to daily outdoor exercise, sufficient kennel space and a reasonable limit on the number of animals allowed at a breeding facility. **Would you be likely to favor additional rule changes to the GDA’s Animal Protection Act to help improve the treatment of animals confined in breeding facilities?**
- 17. Backyard Breeders.** Unlike puppy mills, small scale backyard breeders can circumvent inspections due to the GDA’s “de minimus exemption” (i.e., no license is required for breeding one litter per year). Without registration requirements, these breeders can produce multiple litters without fear of detection. Cumulatively, unlicensed breeders contribute immensely to the problem of pet overpopulation in Georgia counties, resulting in substantial cost shifts to local governments, taxpayers and nonprofit organizations. **Would you be likely to favor a reasonable amendment to the de minimus exemption to help reduce noncompliance by backyard breeders?**
- 18. Outdoor Sales of Pets.** Irresponsible, unlicensed breeders often sell pets in outdoor locations away from their place of residence. **Would you likely support a statewide prohibition on the outdoor sales of dogs, cats and domestic rabbits at flea markets, parking lots and other public places to discourage breeders from operating without a GDA Pet Dealer license, a business license, and paying sales tax?**
- 19. Tethering of Dogs.** Dogs who are kept continuously tethered and isolated are denied opportunities to express their natural behaviors both physically and socially. These dogs suffer immensely and often become a bite risk, especially to children. **Do you support or oppose the practice of continuous, unsupervised tethering of dogs? Should a tethered dog ever be left unsupervised? What measures can be taken as a policy maker to reduce the risk to public safety?**

In addition, there has been an attempt in the past to introduce a state bill that would have overturned all anti-tether ordinances in Georgia. Currently, over 50% of Georgia citizens are under some type of tethering restrictions through local ordinances. **If elected, would you safeguard anti-tether ordinances by opposing any state legislation that seeks to nullify them?**

- 20. The Link Between Animal Abuse and Other Crimes.** A large amount of research has been published on the link between animal abuse, interpersonal violence, and collateral crimes. Unlike many states, Georgia does not have a law that would provide civil immunity for professionals such as social workers who report suspected cases of animal abuse or veterinarians who report suspected cases of child/spouse/elder abuse. **Would you likely support state legislation to address this critical gap in civil immunity for professionals?**
- 21. Protective Orders for Animals in Domestic Violence Cases.** A very strong correlation exists between domestic violence and abuse of family pets. Approximately 65% of domestic violence victims delay leaving an abusive home because they fear harm to their pets if left behind. **Would you likely support legislation that includes pets in protective orders for domestic violence cases?**

- 22. Animal Fighting.** Georgia's current animal fighting statute only outlaws dog fighting; yet, other forms of fighting like cockfighting still occur and are associated with similar types of collateral crimes (e.g., illegal drugs). **Would you likely support an amendment to this law which would make it a crime to engage in any type of animal fighting?**

Additional Information:

"The federal Animal Fighting Spectator Prohibition Act, which was included in the final 2014 Farm Bill, makes it a federal felony to knowingly bring a minor under the age of 16 to a dogfight or cockfight, punishable by up to three years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, and a federal misdemeanor to knowingly attend a fight as a spectator, punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$100,000 fine."

- 23. Enforcement of Animal Cruelty Laws.** Too often animal cruelty cases are overlooked because existing laws are not being adequately enforced. Free training opportunities are available from nonprofits that can improve enforcement and prosecution outcomes. State Resolution 952 was introduced to the Georgia General Assembly in 2020, which would encourage law enforcement and other officials to seek additional training from nonprofits related to animal welfare investigations, including animal cruelty/neglect, dog fighting, dangerous dogs, and correlating human/animal linked crimes. **Would you likely support a bill or resolution that encourages animal control officers, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges to seek free or low-cost training related to investigating and prosecuting animal-related crimes?**

SR 952: <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20192020/SR/952>

- 24. Horse Racing.** Every year thousands of horses are maimed, killed and sold for slaughter in the horse racing industry due to doping, overuse of therapeutic drugs, and overbreeding. It is estimated that approximately 12% of racehorses end up in foreign slaughterhouses. Dozens of tracks have closed in recent years as the industry declines in popularity with humane consumers. **Would you likely support or oppose the establishment of the horse racing industry in Georgia?**

Additional information:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-staggering-toll-in-dead-horses-makes-it-clear-its-time-to-outlaw-horse-racing/2019/10/08/b0f97a06-e52c-11e9-a331-2df12d56a80b_story.html

- 25. Good Samaritans for Dogs in Hot Cars.** Last year legislation was passed giving law enforcement immunity from civil lawsuits when they free/extract distressed people or animals trapped in hot cars (SB 31). **Would you likely support a bill that provides civil immunity to ordinary citizens for this same humane action?**
- 26. The Official State Dog of GA.** In 2016, the Georgia General Assembly named The Adoptable Dog as the Official State Dog of Georgia, with the intent of encouraging adoption to reduce pet homelessness. The Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) has acknowledged that thousands of healthy, friendly dogs are euthanized each year due to an inadequate number of responsible homes to care for them. **Have you ever adopted, fostered, or rescued an animal or has anyone in your immediate family?**



*The Georgia Pet Coalition is a nonpartisan group providing informational opportunities for Georgia's animal advocates.
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