

2024 GEORGIA LEGISLATIVE RECAP FOR COMPANION ANIMAL BILLS

The 2024 Georgia General Assembly concluded on March 28 with some incremental gains for companion animal protection. Three bills passed that relate to the nonprofit veterinary workforce shortage, animal crimes, and housing security for low-income renters (i.e., keeping people and pets together).

The GPC works year-round on policy development and will continue to educate lawmakers in the off session. If you would like guidance on setting up an in-person meeting with your state lawmakers, please contact us at gapetcoalition@gmail.com. As 2024 will be an election year for all state lawmakers, please take the time to ask incumbents and candidates where they stand on companion animal issues. Your vote is the voice for vulnerable companion animals. See our Citizen Lobbying Tips at: <https://www.gapetcoalition.org/advocacy>

Below is a recap of companion animal related bills and measures brought before the 2024 Georgia General Assembly. The GPC is deeply appreciative to those lawmakers who sponsored or cosponsored beneficial bills and resolutions. This legislative session was the second year of a two-year Biennium, so bills that did not receive a vote in 2024 will need to be reintroduced under new bill numbers in 2025.

BENEFICIAL BILLS THAT PASSED (and are waiting Kemp's signature to become law)

SB 410 (Senator Kay Kirkpatrick): <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/66397>

The GA Pet Coalition is pleased to have successfully led SB 410 to its unanimous passage in both the House and Senate. The bill creates an expedited pathway for out-of-state vets and vet techs to practice shelter medicine and nonprofit pet sterilization (including mobile units) in our state by providing a 6-month temporary Georgia license.

SB 63 (Senator Randy Robertson): <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63873>

This bill adds "cruelty to animals," as described in O.C.G.A. 16-12-4, to the list of crimes that require cash bail to be released from custody after arrest; includes both misdemeanors and felonies.

HB 404, The Safe at Home Act (Representative Kasey Carpenter):

<https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/64363>

This bill provides measures that reduce the chance of eviction for renters. While not specifically a companion animal bill, housing security for people leads to fewer surrendered or abandoned pets.

RESOLUTION ADOPTED (A resolution is not legally binding but is an acknowledgement that animal protection issues are important to Georgia citizens.)

SR 588 (Senator Sally Harrell): <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/66934>

This resolution recognizes the important work of Georgia's animal shelters and rescues, and honors those who work diligently to care for homeless animals.

PROCLAMATION ISSUED BY GOVERNOR KEMP

Spay / Neuter Awareness Month in Georgia, February 2024:

Governor Kemp issued a Proclamation recognizing February 2024 as Spay / Neuter Awareness Month in Georgia, and February 27th as World Spay Day (see below*). For more information on World Spay Day: https://www.hsvma.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=578:world_spay_day&catid=20:advocacy

EDUCATIONAL PILOT PROGRAM APPROVED FOR FUNDING IN FY2025 BUDGET

Georgia Responsible Pet Owners Initiative (Georgia Department of Agriculture):

<https://tinyurl.com/p6k8zvw9>

Led by the Georgia Companion Animal Advocacy/Coalition, this proposal requested funding for a state government website/portal through the Department of Agriculture that will feature pet owner education, public service announcements on spay/neuter, and an online database of low-cost pet owner resources to target some causes of pet overpopulation.

BENEFICIAL BILLS THAT DID NOT RECEIVE A VOTE IN ONE OR BOTH CHAMBERS

HB 573 (Representative Joseph Gullett): <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/64803>

Spearheaded by the GA Pet Coalition, this bill would prohibit the sale of dogs, cats and pet rabbits in poorly regulated transient locations such as parking lots, flea markets and roadsides. Passage of the measure would be an important step towards limiting opportunities for pet peddling by reckless backyard breeders who place profit and quick cash over animal welfare.

HB 418 (Representative Rick Williams): <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/66457>

SB 418 amends O.C.G.A. 35-8-7 and would establish basic and in-service training courses on animal fighting and recognition of animal abuse for all peace officers (Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council).

HB 217 (Representative Scott Hilton): <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63970>

The GPC is opposed to any form of animal fighting. HB 217 would add cockfighting to Georgia's dogfighting statute and add increased penalties for bringing a minor to a dogfight or cockfight.

SB 255 (Senator Chuck Payne): <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/64840>

SB 255 is the companion bill to HB 217 and would add cockfighting to Georgia's dogfighting statute and add increased penalties for bringing a minor to a dogfight or cockfight.

HB 1274 (Representative David Huddleston): <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/67034>

Led by the Georgia Veterinary Medical Association, this bill would amend the existing educational loan repayment program for veterinarians with large or mixed animal practices in designated rural areas (minimum 20 hours/week required for large animals). It would increase loan repayment to \$25k/year, guarantee a three-year repayment schedule, and redefine "rural" to mean a population of 50,000 or less (thus increasing the number of qualifying counties).

SB 142, Responsible Dog Ownership/Dangerous Dog Amendments (Senator Lee Anderson):

<https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/64229>

This bill would amend O.C.G.A. 4-8-2, relating to responsible dog ownership, so as to revise the definition of dangerous dog. It would also require minimum liability insurance and provide criminal penalties for failure to maintain liability insurance coverage. It would disallow the classification of a dog based solely on breed or appearance. Concerns regarding bill language remain; the GPC has no formal position yet.

NOTE ON HORSE RACING AND PARIMUTUEL BETTING

No bills specifically related to gambling on live horse racing events were introduced the 2024 session. For a multitude of financial and ethical reasons, the GA Pet Coalition is opposed to the establishment of horse racing tracks in Georgia and will continue to oppose any bill that legalizes parimutuel betting. Please see our Fact Sheet and videos at: <https://www.gapetcoalition.org/horseracing>

***Proclamation signed by Governor Kemp on January 25, 2024**



BY THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF GEORGIA

A PROCLAMATION

SPAY/NEUTER AWARENESS MONTH

- WHEREAS:** Domestic animals have provided companionship to people throughout history, and today, companion animals offer affection and an improved sense of well-being to millions of Georgians; and
- WHEREAS:** Spaying or neutering pets promotes the health of companion animals, has been shown to significantly reduce pet overpopulation, and helps to eliminate or decrease several pet health problems that can be difficult or expensive to treat; and
- WHEREAS:** Each year, shelters euthanize hundreds of thousands of healthy, adoptable cats and dogs because of a lack of resources to care for them; and
- WHEREAS:** All of Georgians domestic animals deserve loving homes and proper care throughout their lifetimes; and
- WHEREAS:** The State of Georgia encourages all Georgians to learn about their options to spay and neuter their pets this month and encourages them to support their local animal shelters, rescue groups, and spay neuter organizations that are leading the way in promoting and protecting animal welfare, while also joining in recognizing February 27, 2024, as World Spay Day; now
- THEREFORE:** I, BRIAN P. KEMP, Governor of the State of Georgia, do hereby proclaim February 2024, as SPAY/NEUTER AWARENESS MONTH in Georgia.

In witness thereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the Executive Department to be affixed this 25th day of January in the year of our Lord, Two Thousand and Twenty-Four.


GOVERNOR

ATTEST


CHIEF OF STAFF

