

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONTACT: Karel Minor
Office: 610-921-2348, ext. 10
kminor@berkshumane.org

Humane Society of Berks County Seizes Dogs and Issues Cruelty Citations to Maxatawny Kennel Owner

The Humane Society of Berks County (HSBC), the leader in animal welfare, announced that it served a warrant this morning to investigate alleged animal cruelty at the Burkholder Farm Kennel, 460 Bowers Road, Maxatawny Township. The warrant was issued following an independent investigation by the HSBC based on multiple failing kennel inspections during 2008 and on its own undercover investigation of conditions at the kennel. The HSBC credited the Berks County District Attorney's Office for their assistance, District Justice Gail Greth with issuing the warrant, and Dog Wardens from the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement with issuing the failing reports that prompted the HSBC's investigation. "Too often these cases are not taken seriously by prosecutors and the courts until it is too late and animals are dying from abuse and neglect. That was not the case in Berks County," said Karel Minor, Humane Society Executive Director. "Because the charges were taken seriously we were able to help the animals when they could still be saved. Our goal in this case was to intervene before there was a catastrophe."

Based on the recommendation of an HSBC staff veterinarian who examined the dogs on the scene, officers immediately seized nine dogs requiring immediate medical attention of the 102 dogs on site. The kennel owner, Aaron Burkholder, was initially extremely uncooperative, delaying identification and veterinary status of the dogs in question. After producing proof that one dog was under veterinary care, it was returned to him. The remaining eight dogs were voluntarily surrendered by Burkholder. Humane Officers expect to file twenty or more cruelty citations for failure to provide needed medical care, inadequate housing and unsanitary conditions. Officers also made it clear to Burkholder that he had the option to surrender any or all animals he felt he could not care for with no additional charges. "We want to avoid the mass killings seen by another kennel operator in following orders by Dog Wardens recently," said Minor. "We made it crystal clear that there will be no need or excuse for destroying these dogs."

The Humane Society hopes that the cruelty citations, together with recent a guilty plea by Burkholder, will result on the revocation of his kennel license. Burkholder holds a K5 commercial kennel license, which allows for 251 or more dogs to be sold each year. He has received a series of poor kennel reports over recent years, however, the quality of the kennel conditions decline during 2008 and intensity and frequency of the State's inspections picked up. Under Governor Rendell's administration, significant changes have been made to the Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement that has resulted in increased scrutiny of kennels and higher expectations for kennel conditions. However, Dog Wardens and Humane Officers still face obstacles in shutting down failing kennels. "The current fines and penalties are a joke," said Minor. "They offer no real incentive to make improvements and under State law right now kennel owners can just take the dogs out and shoot them in order to avoid penalties and requirements."

The Humane Society of Berks County has been actively promoting two House Bills that would add teeth to kennel regulations and strengthen cruelty laws. HB 2525 would dramatically overhaul kennel regulations and allow for stricter and swifter enforcement by the State and HB 2532 would mandate that only veterinarians perform major surgical procedures, such as cesarean sections, on dogs. Several Berks Representatives have championed these bills, including HB 2532 author Tom Caltagirone (PA 127th) and Carl Mantz (PA 187th) who both voted for HB 2532 in committee, and David Kessler (PA 130th) who voted for HB 2525 in committee. But until those bills pass, the Humane Society will be aggressively pursuing violators under current cruelty law. Said Minor, "There is no such thing as 'a little cruelty'. Inadequate kennel owners need to know that if they are in violation of the law, they will be held to account in Berks County."

The Humane Society of Berks County serves all of Berks County and surrounding communities. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania's animal cruelty laws for all of Berks County, the Humane Society provides adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, veterinary services to the general public, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society is located at 1801 N. 11th Street, Reading, and 1201 Ben Franklin Highway E., Douglassville.

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