

In June 2003 an amendment to the animal welfare laws in Virginia went into effect. The amendment was put forward by the Virginia Federation of Humane Societies and was supported by the multimillion-dollar animal rights organization, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). The amendment makes it impossible for national rescue organizations to operate in Virginia with the certain knowledge that they are obeying the law.

WRAP, the national whippet rescue organization, still operates in Virginia, but we are no longer official members. If you know of a whippet needing rescue or are interested in adopting one, contact us or one of the people below:

Amherst

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Midlothian (Richmond area)

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Smithfield (Virginia Beach/Norfolk area)

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The law that prevents many national rescues from operating in Virginia is at <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?031+ful+CHAP1007>

"Home-based rescue" is defined as "any person or organization that accepts (i) more than 12 companion animals or (ii) more than nine companion animals and more than three unweaned litters of companion animals in a calendar year for the purpose of finding permanent adoptive homes for the companion animals and houses the companion animals in a private residential dwelling or uses a system of housing companion animals in private residential foster homes."

Since it says "person or organization," if WRAP officially operates in Virginia, the law would apply to the organization, as it definitely rescues more than 12 dogs a year. The law does not apply to the four individual rescuers here because none of them takes in 12 animals a year individually. So the rescuers withdrew from WRAP and WRAP withdrew from the state. Why?

The new law requires that every member of the organization (more than 100 people all over the United States) read and sign a statement specifying that he or she has never been convicted of animal cruelty, neglect, or abandonment; these statements must be kept updated by WRAP. The statement must also be signed by anyone to whom WRAP transfers a dog.

The organization must keep detailed records of each dog received for two years and submit a summary to the Virginia State Veterinarian annually on a form provided by the state.

These records also must be "made available upon request to the department, animal control officers, and law-enforcement officers at mutually agreeable times." Since WRAP's records are maintained by the national coordinator in Dallas, this would be problematical at best.

The membership of WRAP changes frequently--rescuers leave and rescuers join. To collect signed statements from all these people and keep them updated, on top of insuring that proper records of dogs are being kept in the format that one state requires is too much to ask of a volunteer organization that is already stretched to the limit. This may not seem unreasonable until you consider the amount of paperwork it requires a volunteer organization to maintain for one state. There are 49 other states to consider, and thanks to the intervention of the Humane Society of the United States, many of them are busy coming up with their own requirements.

Dog rescue is a public service provided by people who contribute their own time and money. Regulations of this type are damaging and will eventually either force rescuers "underground" or end the practice altogether. Laws protecting rescued dogs are already in place through animal welfare and anti-cruelty laws...rescuers are covered under them just as any other dog owner. The Virginia rescue laws are another example of an animal rights agenda that has as its end goal the control of all sources of pets and the eventual end of pet ownership. For more discussion of this, we invite you to join the Pet-Law list at Yahoogroups.

The HSUS, incidentally, is an animal rights organization based in Washington, DC. In spite of its name, it is not connected to local humane societies or associations. The Internal Revenue Service form 990 (Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax) for HSUS in 2000 reports net assets of \$106,840,986. Their top five executives were paid a total of \$949,260 in salaries. Last year Worth magazine rated it among the worst-managed charities in the United States, noting that it took in over \$65 million in 2000 and spent over half of that on fundraising.