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Nixed bill would have regulated dangerous animals

By Kellen Henry
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A bill that would regulate dangerous and non-native animals in West Virginia died in the House Judiciary Committee at the end of the Legislature's regular session, according to state Sen. Larry Edgell, D-Wetzel.

The Non-native Animal Regulations Act would have established a three-member board with the power to regulate and require permits for animals bred, sold and owned as pets in the state.

Edgell, the agriculture chair and a sponsor of the bill, said that the House Judiciary Committee decided not to bring the bill to the floor because of the many complaints the legislation had received from pet stores and private pet owners.

"A misconception is that this is to regulate pet stores. The main thing is really to get dangerous animals registered and have somebody regulate them. It's the fees and things that scare people," Edgell said.

Colby Homer, of Wheeling, heads West Virginia Petlaw, an online alliance which opposes laws limiting traditional pet ownership in West Virginia.

"We respect that the legislation is trying to serve, but it is important to understand that these bills need to be scrapped. They need a more basic bill, not a broad one," she said.

The bill would have allowed the three members to declare any animal, with the exception of livestock, in need of regulation, licensing or even banning in the state, Homer said.

"We must continue to advise our busy legislators that bills concerning animals must be effective. With animals, there are nuances that are not apparent. They need to consider the source of the legislation," she said.

Some of the exotic pet legislation comes from interest groups who want to outlaw all pets and not from an actual need to control dangerous animals. The group is pleased that the bill did not pass, but Petlaw will continue to fight against new laws of this type, Homer said.

Edgell said that he hopes to reintroduce the topic for an interim study before next term and then pass then legislation when the state's Legislature is in session again.

"I worked for that bill for five years. It's something we need to do. There is no control over animals that are dangerous, and we certainly need something put in place," Edgell said.

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