

## Goldie's Act: Restoring Welfare to the Animal Welfare Act Rep. Cindy Axne (D-IA-03)

**Policy Background:** The Animal Welfare Act (AWA) sets minimal welfare requirements for certain animals in commercial facilities. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for inspecting these facilities, ensuring the animals are properly cared for. Unfortunately, USDA has systemically failed to enforce those requirements- particularly for dogs bred for the pet trade.

Over the years, records of violations from breeders by the USDA have dramatically declined. Enforcement plummeted in 2020 when the USDA opened only 30 new AWA enforcement cases—a decline of nearly 90% from the 252 cases it opened in 2014<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the USDA has imposed **no penalties** against any commercial dog dealers since 2017<sup>2</sup>.

Goldie was one of hundreds of dogs in an Iowa puppy mill licensed by the USDA to a dog breeder named Daniel Gingerich. Gingerich had the dogs living in abhorrent conditions, and USDA inspectors found-but did not record on the official inspection report- a golden retriever later described in a civil complaint as “extremely emaciated.” Her name was Goldie.



*Goldie, pictured above, was one of over 500 dogs kept in abhorrent conditions at a USDA licensed commercial breeder. The bill is named in remembrance of this dog's life.*

The USDA allowed Goldie to suffer and deteriorate for months, even though they had the authority to halt the abuse and are directed by the AWA to protect dogs in these facilities. Despite Goldie's suffering, the USDA failed to document the dog's existence and condition for months- and continued to permit Gingerich to operate his business. Eventually, Goldie was found in a barn with no water, her bones protruding, and zero body fat. According to state reports, a veterinarian was called, and USDA inspectors allowed her to be euthanized on site.

**Bill Summary:** This legislation would mandate that USDA inspectors document and report all observed AWA violations, as intended by the law— ending once and for all the USDA's policy of coddling bad actors and other ineffective approaches. It would also require the USDA to consider penalties against every dog dealer who violates the law and improve cross-reporting of animal cruelty at these facilities between the USDA and local and state authorities.

Specifically, this legislation would require USDA to:

- ✓ Conduct more frequent and meaningful inspections
- ✓ Confiscate animals that are suffering
- ✓ Impose deterring monetary penalties for violations, and
- ✓ Share inspection information in a timely manner with local law enforcement.

**Supporting Organizations:** American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Animal Rescue League (ARL) of Iowa, Humane Society Legislative Fund (HSLF), Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/ies/ies\\_performance\\_metrics/ies\\_panels/enforcement-summaries#:~:text=AWA%20and%20HPA\),in%20fiscal%20year%202020%2C%20APHIS%20Investigative%20and%20Enforcement%20Services%20opened,and%20suspending%20or%20revoking%20six](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/ies/ies_performance_metrics/ies_panels/enforcement-summaries#:~:text=AWA%20and%20HPA),in%20fiscal%20year%202020%2C%20APHIS%20Investigative%20and%20Enforcement%20Services%20opened,and%20suspending%20or%20revoking%20six)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.aspc.org/sites/default/files/aspc\\_a\\_complaint\\_6.11.21.pdf](https://www.aspc.org/sites/default/files/aspc_a_complaint_6.11.21.pdf)