

JUDGE ORDERS SPECIAL PROSECUTOR TO INVESTIGATE DOG BREEDER

Prosecutor Will Investigate Criminal Animal Cruelty at Ridglan Farms, Which Breeds Dogs for Testing

January 9, 2025, MADISON, WI – Today, a judge in Dane County, Wisconsin, appointed a special prosecutor to investigate and potentially prosecute criminal animal cruelty at Ridglan Farms, one of the last two remaining large breeders of dogs for animal experimentation in the country. Advocates say this is a rare opportunity for accountability at a facility that has a lengthy record of unlawful cruelty violations. They also say that such cruelty is inevitable at facilities like Ridglan, which they call “factory farms for dogs.”

“When you cage thousands of dogs in a warehouse, never let them outside, and provide them essentially no social interaction, all in order to sell them to animal experimenters for profit, cruelty is baked into the business model,” said Steffen Seitz, a litigation fellow with the [Animal Activist Legal Defense Project](#). “Dogs should be home with family, not locked in cages or treated like test tubes.”

The appointment of a special prosecutor follows years of documented cruelty at Ridglan, by both state and federal agencies, animal activist investigators, and former-employee whistleblowers. Despite years of repeated violations on USDA and Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) inspection reports, Ridglan has never been held liable. As detailed last Fall [in Isthmus](#), violations found during the most recent routine DATCP inspection, in [June 2024](#), prompted a follow-up inspection in September. Shockingly, Ridglan incurred [twice the number of violations in September](#) as it had in June, even when it knew a follow up inspection was imminent.

At an [all-day evidentiary hearing](#) in the in October, witnesses, government reports, and investigative footage and photos painted a dire portrait of the conditions for dogs trapped inside Ridglan. Evidence showed that many of the dogs are housed completely alone, without any social interaction. Other dogs, housed together, regularly fought, with little intervention by staff. The dogs have no access to the outdoors and little enrichment. They engage in extreme and

trauma-indicative behaviors, like constantly spinning or pacing. In at least one instance, a beagle was torn apart and half devoured by other beagles packed in the cage. One of the most persistent problems is mesh wire flooring that causes foot injuries and infections that go untreated. In the most recent DATCP inspection reports, in June and September 2024, dogs had severe, untreated lesions and were limping in pain.

Some of the most harrowing testimony came from former-employee whistleblowers, who described daily “cherry eye” surgeries, in which one Ridglan employee holds down a beagle while another cuts off a portion of the dog’s eyelid—without anesthesia, bleeding control, or aftercare, and during which the dogs are visibly in pain; [a puppy killed by being suffocated in a freezer bag](#); and devocalization surgeries, in which dogs were given a paralytic agent and then had their vocal cords cut while paralyzed but awake.

Ridglan is one of only two large breeders of dogs for experimentation in the U.S. In 2022, [a third such breeder—Envigo—was shuttered](#), after federal agents seized dogs in need of immediate medical care, then levied the [largest fine in history](#) for animal welfare violations. Given the horrific animal welfare records at Ridglan and Envigo, animal advocates say there is no better example of the reality of how dogs are treated in the experimentation industry.

A request for a special prosecutor is a mechanism by which an ordinary citizen can ask a court to appoint a prosecutor specifically to pursue an investigation into potential charges for crimes that a sitting prosecutor has failed to address.

Seitz and AALDP represent [Dane4Dogs](#), and are joined by co-petitioners [Alliance for Animals](#), represented by Kristin Schrank, and animal rescuer Wayne Hsiung of [The Simple Heart](#), in the request for a special prosecutor.

The [Animal Activist Legal Defense Project](#) at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law works to empower and defend animal advocates through activist defense, affirmative litigation, and training law students to join and transform the field of Animal Law. Learn more at [AALDP.com](#) and follow us at [@AALDP_DU](#) on [Twitter/X](#) and [Instagram](#).

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