

POTEAU - A hearing to determine the constitutionality of the state's puppy mill rules

was cut short Friday after an attorney for pet breeders fainted in the courtroom.

About 15 minutes into the hearing - conducted under heightened security at the LeFlore

County Courthouse - attorney Misty Fields turned suddenly and fell to the floor. The

wife of Fields' client, dog breeder Charles Evans, rushed to her side and called

for an ambulance. Fields had been in a spirited argument over pretrial issues with

Assistant Attorney General Devan Pederson when she fainted. Fields was trying to persuade LeFlore

County District Judge Jonathan Sullivan to allow the case to become a class-action suit

on behalf of all dog breeders in the state. Otherwise, a ruling in the

Evans suit might or might not apply to all of them. Fields has argued

that the rules of the Oklahoma Commercial Pet Breeders Board are unconstitutional for several

reasons, including that the state constitution gives exclusive authority to regulate commercial animal breeding

to the Oklahoma Board of Agriculture. After Fields fainted, the hearing was suspended. An

ambulance crew took her to a local hospital, where she was treated and released.

After Fields left, Sullivan reconvened the hearing with Fields' co-counsel, Ronald Durbin, representing the

dog breeders. Given the circumstances, the judge said he would consider the briefs filed

in the case and possibly rule on their basis. If testimony is required to

determine remaining issues, another hearing could be called, Sullivan said. The hearing was conducted

under tight security after the LeFlore County District Attorney's Office received a death threat

against one of its investigators who had been involved in an enforcement action involving

a dog breeder. Private security personnel escorted the chairman of the pet breeders board

and one of the board's inspectors into the courtroom. Deputies searched all bags brought

into the courtroom. Commercial Pet Breeders Board Chairman Angel Soriano said he was disappointed

that the state didn't get the issue resolved Friday. "We really wanted to get

this behind us," he said. Fields said she was glad Durbin was there to

step in for her and was also disappointed not to get the issue decided

because she thinks her arguments would have prevailed. Wayne Greene 918-581-8308 wayne.greene@tulsaworld.com was arguing on behalf of a dog breeder who is challenging the state's new puppy mill rules.