

Testimony of Isabel C. Morales

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- **CT HB 5493—“Puppy Lemon Law,” Fines for Pet Stores and Breeding Kennels**
- **CT HB 5798—Dog Tethering and Confinement**

Senator Meyer, Rep. Roy, Environment Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to comment on bills before this committee. As OPIN Treasurer, active SACC volunteer, member of CT Votes for Animals, and register voter and consumer, I care deeply about the following bills.

Puppy Lemon Law, HB 5493. Volunteering at SACC, I have witnessed many smiles on children’s faces. Unfortunately, I have also seen when tears replace the laughter. Sick pups recently bought at pet stores are surrendered when the family, after spending thousands of dollars for the pup, can’t afford the vet bill. The stories are very similar. The family falls in-love with a puppy which, they are told, is healthy and happy. The kids are thrilled; mom and dad pay for “Marley” and take him home. Everything is fine the first couple of days, sometimes weeks. Suddenly Marley stops eating, or starts having diarrhea or respiratory distress, starts walking funny or lacks energy. Marley goes to the vet and is diagnosed with distemper or giardia, kennel cough, upper respiratory infection, worm infestation, ear infection, and sometimes even a case of broken bones healed incorrectly on their own. Mom and dad call the store and are told that the store is not responsible for vet bills and won’t take the pup back. At this point, the family can sue the store, assume the bills, have the puppy killed or give Marley to a shelter. Since the children love Marley, families that can, assume the bills. If they can’t pay and can’t bear having the pup killed, they bring it to the shelter where the children cry as Marley is taken away.

In this all too common scenario nobody wins. The pet store loses a repeat customer, referral sales and thousands of dollars in future revenues for food, toys and all the paraphernalia that Marley would have used during his estimated 13 years of life. Mom and dad are out a considerable amount of money and feel guilty for putting the children through this ordeal. The children are deeply hurt as their play-mate, friend and companion is gone. The City Shelter spends scarce tax payer dollars and, in the case of Stamford, limited private donations on Marley’s care; And, the last but not the least of the losers: Marley. Marley sometimes pays with his life for the irresponsibility and short term business sense of pet stores that to make an extra buck buy puppies from unregulated kennels if not inhumane puppy mills. All of these can be avoided if Marley is acquired from a reputable kennel licensed by the USDA, or any appropriated state agency. HB 5493 improves the State’s “Puppy Lemon Law” and institutes a fine scheme for pet stores and kennels, which holds them accountable for poor standards of care, thereby forcing them to emphasize getting healthy puppies from humane breeding kennels. Please support HB5493.

HB5798 institutes an enforceable ban on unreasonably tethering and confinement of dogs. Being a volunteer for many years at the Stamford municipal shelter, I have witnessed innumerable instances where concerned citizens call complaining about a dog in their neighborhood being chained for long periods of time. When the situation doesn’t change, the person calls back to find out why the Animal Control Officers (ACO) has not done anything. It is difficult to explain to a concerned individual that the existing law regarding tethering is vague and very difficult to enforce and that the best the ACO can do in most cases is talk with the dog owner. The word “cruel” surfaces invariably during these telephone conversations and the complainants are correct. It is mentally and physically cruel to tie a dog with a short chain for extended periods of time, as anyone who would volunteer to be tied with a 3 foot leash to a post with nothing to do for hours on end would attest to. However, as long as the dog has water and is not showing an abnormal lack of weight, tethering of this kind is not considered cruel under the current State law; ergo the need for HB 5798. Furthermore, dogs chained for long periods of time have been proven to be three times more likely to bite. This, in my mind, is an unnecessary public health risk that can be minimized by passing HB5798. Please support HB5798.

I strongly urge you to support these two important bills. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify.