

Testimony of Allison Allen  
Founding Member, Westport Coalition Against Puppy Mills  
In Support of Raised Bill 5409

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about Raised Bill 5409 and the important subject of sick puppy mill puppies that are allowed to be sold in our state by pet stores. This is an issue which never gets enough attention. It's truly a national disgrace, considering we call dogs "man's best friend".

I've been a volunteer at a local animal shelter in Norwalk, CT for 20+ years. About 5 years ago, a group of local animal advocates came together after we saw a puppy store opening in our town, claiming they were not selling puppy mill puppies. This seemed incongruous knowing what we knew about the pet trade and puppy mill industry. We know more about this topic than the average consumer, so we were compelled to start doing the research to see if this claim could possibly be true.

Our research found that this claim was absolutely not true and prompted us to continue researching the breeders used by this store as well as stores across CT. We formed a group, the Westport Coalition Against Puppy Mills, which is a small grassroots group of people who care about dogs and their welfare. It wasn't something any of us particularly wanted to do or had time for, but we began to meet people everywhere that had bad experiences buying sick pet store puppies. We realized if we didn't do anything, nothing was ever going to change.

Basically we find:

- Pet stores mislead consumers on an ongoing basis about where the puppies come from. A large percent of people still do not know pet store puppies come from puppy mills, nor are stores willing to tell them. Stores use phrases like "USDA Licensed" or "AKC registered" which sounds good to the average person, but says nothing about the quality of the breeding facility.
- The average person doesn't know they can research USDA breeders on their website. It's not the easiest to find, but it's doable. There is no Consumer Report for pet store puppies and there's no centralized data or tracking of the issue in our state or nationally.
- The average person does not know to call CT Department of Agriculture when they have a sick puppy or see a problem in a pet store, so most people simply don't, so the problem is overlooked.
- Many vets don't even know a puppy lemon law exists so they are not advising consumers of this recourse and providing them with added consumer protection.
- A puppy lemon law where you have to return a puppy is pointless as most people are not going to return a puppy to a store as they feel they are buying the puppy to "rescue" him.
- In the five plus years our group has been at work, it's become increasingly clear that there is no one agency or organization effectively tracking the extent of the problem, which we have found to be much larger than most people think.

Our group is aware of approximately 100 complaints for our one local store alone. Some of these people have vet bills exceeding \$10,000. All of these people would have benefited from the puppy lemon law and none of them were aware such a law existed in CT. Pet stores certainly don't share that information, but they must be required to do so. Every person that buys a puppy should receive a copy of the puppy lemon law as well as simple guidelines on how the law works and signage should absolutely be posted in every store. I would also suggest that a copy of this information be sent to the CTVMA to distribute to their members as veterinarians should have an interest in protecting their clients.

Thank you for this opportunity to bring attention to puppy mills and the need for stronger laws such as bill #5409. I hope you will all strongly support this important piece of legislation and encourage your colleagues to do the same.

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