

Chairman Roy, Chairman Meyer, Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding RB 253. We represent the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association, which includes 95% of Connecticut-licensed veterinarians. Our Association supports multiple forms of humane, charitable outreach to benefit the public and their animals. Our programs include annual low-cost Rabies immunization clinics conducted in cooperation with municipalities; support for the Department of Agriculture's Animal Population Control Program; the Companions-in-Crisis program that shelters pets of domestic violence victims; the CTSART Program in which CVMA collaborates with state and local emergency management agencies to shelter animals caught up in disasters and the Big Fix Program, through which hundreds of animals were neutered last week on behalf of low income pet owners. We strive to ensure that we fulfill the Veterinarian's Oath, which reminds us of our dual duties, first to benefit society, and second to relieve animal suffering.

When Public Act 11-187 went into effect just 5 months ago, it established for the first time, a reasoned approach to the growing public health problem of unregulated transport of animals into Connecticut. These animals were being imported in a manner which kept them removed from oversight by Connecticut animal health authorities, and the animals often had undeclared health problems. This led to disease exposure to existing Connecticut animals and unexpected veterinary care costs for unsuspecting animal owners. Importation as it was practiced also included increased risk of undetected Rabies exposure to both people and animals, something that has now occurred in two other New England states affected by importation.

Widespread animal importation began during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, but has continued long after disaster conditions there were resolved. Prior to enactment of Public Act 11-187 and enabled by the Internet, importation of out-of-state origin animals into Connecticut continued on a massive scale. Known as "pet rescue", importation occurred without oversight by Connecticut animal health authorities, or any requirement for examination by a Connecticut licensed veterinarian,

Exactly because importation is performed by numerous individuals and entities previously without due diligence regarding disease control or consumer protection, a new law was needed which cast the widest net possible in terms of the forms of importation to be overseen. To best protect the public health, it was necessary to include all magnitude of animal importers not regulated elsewhere in the law. Pet stores were specifically excluded in the new provisions, precisely because of their inclusion in existing law. This was true whether an importer had imported one or many animals, and irrespective of what financial arrangements may have been construed. Disease risk should be evaluated one animal at a time.

The first key provision of Public Act 11-187 as written, is that it requires a veterinary examination on Connecticut soil within 48 hours of arrival, and then periodically until final transfer to a new owner is made. This first examination just after arrival assures health once inside Connecticut and after the stress of shipment may uncover incubating disease. The second key provision is the final veterinary examination that must occur within 15 days prior to the last transfer of the animal to a permanent owner, again to assure health. Many animals are "warehoused" in so-called "foster" homes in Connecticut, for periods up to and sometimes beyond a year before being placed in their final home. Significant disease exposure can occur during foster care, as multiple animals from diverse sources may be housed together or cross paths in transit. A dog in foster care should not be viewed as having completed its final transfer, but should be re-examined just prior to its permanent placement in a new, final home. Our well-regulated pet stores are expected to be responsible for the health of the animals they sell, both when they arrive in the store, and also at the time they are sold. This is true regardless of how long the animals may remain in the store prior to sale. There is no medically defensible reason that all other forms of animal commerce should not be held to the same standard.

These two elements, a first physical examination within 48 hours of arrival and a last examination 15 days before permanent transfer, are critical to ensure health at both ends of an animal's journey through Connecticut into its new home. Any weakening of these two provisions will defeat the overall intent of the legislation and return Connecticut to a condition of poorly regulated animal importation and increased animal health risk. It matters little whether those enabling importation arrange delivery of one, or a trailer full of animals, with respect to animal health. It is essential the law continue to include the smallest of importers along with the larger-scale operations that garner the most negative media attention when violations occur. Each imported animal's health must be evaluated individually, based on the same requirements. Each animal transferred to a new owner must be healthy at the time a permanent transfer is made.

As written, Public Act 11-187 elegantly facilitates the ability of animal health officials to control animal importation, protect animal health, ensure humane transport standards and protect Connecticut animal owners and their animals. As professionals dedicated to preventing and treating disease, we urge you to decline any weakening of Public Act 11-187 and vote no on RB 253. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association