



**PET INDUSTRY JOINT ADVISORY COUNCIL**

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**TESTIMONY OF PET INDUSTRY JOINT ADVISORY COUNCIL**

**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT**

**HOUSE BILL 5027**

**March 15, 2013**

Position: Qualified Opposition

As the world's largest trade association representing pet animal interests, the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) appreciates the opportunity to offer this esteemed committee our views on House Bill 5027. Representing the interests of all segments of the pet industry throughout the United States, PIJAC counts among its thousands of members various associations, organizations, corporations and individuals involved in the commercial pet trade. More specifically, we represent pet breeders, pet product manufacturers, distributors, retailers and pet owners in Connecticut who would be significantly impacted by the legislation before you today.

Let me emphasize that nobody cares more about healthy pets than does PIJAC. We have, for many years, provided a highly respected animal care certification program intended to ensure that employees are well trained in the care of the animals they sell; a program that is widely utilized not only by persons in the commercial pet trade but also shelters and humane societies throughout the country, and one that has even been adopted as a statutory standard. PIJAC has worked closely with the USDA on effective implementation of the Animal Welfare Act for pets since its inception over three decades ago, and has joined hands with state and local agencies to ensure adoption and enforcement of appropriate regulatory standards. Our association has long been recognized as the voice for a responsible pet trade, and routinely advocates for new statutory standards that are in the best interests of companion animals and the pet-owing public. We also continually seek to advance the voluntary implementation of superior standards in the care, handling and transport of companion animals.

PIJAC has had the privilege of testifying before this committee on many occasions relative to legislation impacting the pet industry and we are proud of our record of supporting sound standards for the pet industry that do not impose burdens so excessive as to unnecessarily put responsible members of the pet trade out of business.

In its support of standards for responsible providers of pets, however, PIJAC has sought to include all such providers. Targeting only a limited segment does a disservice to the pet animals not encompassed by the mandate and a disservice to the pet owning public, as well as creating an unnecessary and inappropriate competitive advantage for providers of pets who are exempted from the statutory or regulatory requirements. In the instant case, we would note that HB 5027 limits its application to pet shops alone. While they are by far the most heavily regulated of all providers of dogs and cats in the state, subject to licensure requirements and a statutory pet warranty that does not apply to other pet providers, pet shops supply only about 7% of all the puppies in the state of Connecticut. Thus, the limited reach of this bill would offer protection for only a small percentage of Connecticut's puppies. Even if effective in limiting dogs from substandard breeders, the bill would leave well over 90% of consumers with the risk of still going home with such a puppy.

We wish to emphasize that we have long sought restrictions on substandard breeders, and wholly support the concept behind this bill. PIJAC would caution, however, that as currently crafted the bill suffers from some weaknesses. We believe that the substantive standards referenced in this legislation are sound, and agree that quality breeders should observe such standards. But this measure includes no mechanism for determining when a breeder has fallen short of such standards. As such, it would be a nightmare for pet shops attempting to evaluate whether given breeders fall under the bill as well as for the state in attempting to enforce the ban against selling dogs from such breeders. To be effective, any legislation of this nature must include an objective basis for compliance.

PIJAC would reiterate also that, to be effective, a bill of this nature should cover much more than merely 7% of the puppies that Connecticut families take home. Indeed, when seeking to ensure that Connecticut's pet owners are getting healthy puppies, pet stores are not even the place we should start. The preeminent study on this question, conducted at Cornell University Veterinary School, found that no source provides healthier puppies on average than do pet stores<sup>1</sup>. Because, as already noted, pet store puppies are subject to stricter statutory standards, and because these puppies enjoy a greater number of veterinary health examinations than do puppies from most other sources, it is not surprising that they typically enjoy good health.

That being said, PIJAC is not suggesting that pet stores be exempt from this legislation. Rather, we would respectfully urge the committee to expand coverage of the bill to cover the many other non-hobby providers of pets.

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<sup>1</sup> "Source of Acquisition as a risk factor for disease and death in pups," *Journal of American Veterinary Medicine*, vol 204, No. 12, June 15, 1994.

Again, PIJAC strongly supports, in concept, legislation that will limit the incidence of puppies sold from substandard breeders. But, for the reasons stated, we do not believe HB 5027 as it is currently crafted will effectively do so. We would, therefore, request that the committee withhold action on the bill at this time pending an opportunity to address concerns. PIJAC would be pleased to work with the bill sponsor and members of this committee to produce a product that will more effectively accomplish this bill's intended purpose.

We thank the committee for your due consideration of our concerns.