

**Testimony Concerning Bill No. 5207**  
**Heather Bradley**  
**CT Coalition Against Puppy Mills**

I would like to thank the Environment Committee for the opportunity to express my support of HB5027, AN ACT PROHIBITING THE SALE OF DOGS AND CATS OBTAINED FROM SUBSTANDARD DOMESTIC ANIMAL MILLS.

I am a registered voter in Guilford, Connecticut and the president of **CT Coalition Against Puppy Mills**, a statewide group that works to bring awareness of the connection between pet stores that sell puppies and the puppy mills that produce the dogs for sale. At least once a month, we hold peaceful protests in front of stores that knowingly buy and sell dogs from puppy mills. We also research and investigate the breeders who are importing dogs into our state for sale and the violations that they incur. Our intent is to get would-be consumers to understand that purchasing anything from a pet store that sells dogs, be it fish food or a puppy, lines the pockets of not just the pet store owners, but also those of the puppy mill operators. Even today as a fully wired society with any information available at the tap of a touchscreen or the click of a mouse, many people still don't know what a puppy mill is. We should *all* know, and we should *all* be outraged.

These mills, although USDA-inspected and approved, churn out puppies by the thousands with little to no care for the well-being of the puppies or their breeding parents. This results in animal cruelty. The breeder dogs, caged for life until they can no longer reproduce, are killed. Sometimes they are shot, and other times they are drowned or gassed- usually whatever method is most cost-effective. Due to overbreeding, lack of medical attention, conditions of the mills and the 18 wheelers they are transported across the country in, it is not uncommon for the puppies to be sick upon arrival at the pet stores. Often they have serious intestinal and bacterial infections and/or upper respiratory ailments. Sometimes it can be even more serious with dogs arriving with the highly contagious and deadly Parvo disease. We hear countless stories from people who have bought dogs from pet stores in Connecticut, only to discover a year or two down the road that their beloved pets have serious, sometimes life-threatening genetic disorders, most likely brought on by the irresponsible breeding practices at the mills. Last year legislation was passed requiring pet store owners in Connecticut to pay up to 500 dollars toward a sick dog's veterinary care. Unfortunately this often doesn't come close to covering the costs to treat the dog, and many people have reported that store owners still refuse to pay. In Connecticut, as part of the puppy lemon law, the pet store owner is required to take a sick dog back in exchange for a different, healthier dog. Besides the fact that most people fall quickly in love with a new puppy and don't want to part with it- be it sick or not, we must be outraged when we think about what will happen to the returned puppy.

Although many of the commonly-used mills have repeat violations, even a mill that has not received any can still legally treat dogs in a way that is clearly inhumane. For example, the standards set by the USDA allow for dogs to be caged *for life* in wire enclosures with only a minimum of six inches on the sides and tops of the enclosures. The dogs have just enough room to sit up and turn in their cages. Typically in mills, there are hundreds of adult dogs and hundreds more puppies who rely on two to three employees for their survival. This means they do not get exercise, clean cages and fresh food and water. Perhaps most significantly, they do not get human affection- something any dog owner knows is what man's best friend values most.

Time and again I read USDA reports citing mills for conditions that anyone with common sense would see as vile and inhumane. These violations are all too common, and generally warrant only a warning from the USDA inspectors. Following are just a few of the violations from several mills who are used by Connecticut pet stores.

*During the inspection all primary enclosures located in the whelping building were occupied. In one enclosure the dealer had housed two females which were due to whelp. During the inspection the adults were found together with three dead puppies in various stages of dismemberment.*

*In the whelping building the bulk food bags are being stored in the storage room and in the hallway. On the floor surface of the food storage room there are still rodent droppings. (Conditions affect thirty-three adults and eighty puppies.)<sup>1</sup>*

*A deer carcass was in the kennel with the Wheaton Terriers. The dogs had been eating on the meat and splintered bones. Road kill animals have no assurance they are not contaminated and wholesome for eating and should not be a food source for dogs.*

*Six of the small, long haired breeds of dogs had long matted and dirty hair. The hair was over the feet, dragging on the floor surface, becoming soiled in feces. Matting of the hair can cause skin irritation, be painful, as well as, if not groomed, cause serious health issues for the dogs.*

*All the water in the water buckets maintained outdoors was frozen solid. The dogs would lick the ice in the containers receiving no relief from their thirst. When the owner gave water to the dogs they drank excessively. Temperature on the day of this inspection was in the low 20s.<sup>2</sup>*

*Within the East Kennel, there are 3 enclosures, containing 4 dogs that have dirty water buckets containing dirty water. Failure to clean and sanitize water buckets and offer fresh water can lead to health hazards for the dogs. All water receptacles must be cleaned and sanitized at least once every two weeks.*

*There is a build-up of feces on the floor of one primary enclosure on the West side on the "North Hog House." There is both old and fresh feces scattered throughout the entire enclosure. The buildup of feces is attracting flies to the enclosure. The flies are resting on the back wall and hovering around the piles of feces. There are two dogs in this enclosure.<sup>3</sup>*

These reports should make our citizens and our legislators outraged, and know that the puppy mills should be outlawed. In the meantime, it would be a tremendous step forward for Connecticut to prohibit the sale of dogs obtained from substandard domestic animal mills. And by *substandard*, I mean USDA-licensed and approved. This would directly impact the mills and the amount of dogs they would be churning out, yet it would also sway pet store owners to take up a humane business model that promoted the welfare of dogs. If pet stores encouraged adoption and responsible breeding, they would benefit from thousands of like-minded people who only do business with these types of pet stores.

So in conclusion, if Connecticut leads the way and passes legislation prohibiting the sale of dogs from mills, it will be a boon for the pet store owners, the animal lovers who will begin to patronize their stores, as well as the overburdened regional and state animal shelters trying to place homeless dogs. Most importantly, we can stand proudly in Connecticut and let the rest of the country know we will not allow people to profit from others' misery. We will not stand idly by and allow animal cruelty for the sake of the almighty dollar. Until then we must be- and we will be-outraged.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify and I do hope you will strongly support this important piece of legislation.

Thank you,

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1. USDA Inspection Report. Clear Springs Kennels operated by Sarah Young of Hardy, AK. November 15, 2011.
2. USDA Inspection Report. Breeding facility operated by Betty Porter of Cumberland, IA. February 11, 2010.
3. USDA Inspection Report. Breeding facility operated by Sue Shold of Albert City, IA. October 3, 2012.