

March 7th, 2014
CT General Assembly

Dear Senator Meyer, Representative Gentile, Senator Maynard, Representative Albis, Senator Chapin, Representative Shaban, and all of the esteemed members of the Environment Committee,

My name is Annie Blumenfeld and I am 15 years old. I live in Fairfield, CT. I am here today to testify in favor of HB 5422, An Act Concerning Awareness of Heartworm Disease and the Standard Dog Licensing Form because of my dog Teddy's experience with heartworm disease. Teddy was rescued from Houston, Texas with heartworm disease. He was inactive in a crate for more than two months, with many vaccinations, X-rays, and constant visits to the vet's office. Luckily, Teddy survived the treatment; unfortunately, many do not in severe cases like his. It was a long, painful, emotional, and expensive process that did not have to happen, which is what this bill addresses.

The cost of treatment for heartworm disease in dogs ranges anywhere from \$1000 to \$2000 in severe cases, while a year's supply of preventatives range from \$45 to \$80 depending on your dog's weight. But, most importantly, Teddy did not have to suffer when this can be avoided.

Heartworm disease cases in Connecticut are hard to trace, because many go unreported. In fact, this is what makes this issue so controversial. Because of this, I have personally visited almost 15 different animal shelters in Connecticut in the past two years. I have learned about each shelter and more specifically I have spoken to the managers of the shelters about how many dogs come in with heartworm. Every time I visit a shelter I try to see the dogs with heartworm to learn about their story. All of the managers have expressed their grief about what these dogs have to go through.

Secondly, I experienced the lack of awareness of heartworm disease while out in the neighborhood walking my dog. Since Teddy is a good-looking dog, I am constantly stopped and asked about him. I share what he went through and most owners are completely unaware of this disease. I strive to spread awareness in many media outlets, such as pet magazines, radio stations, and on the news. I receive so many emails about pet owners sharing their experiences of their dogs and how this is a very important issue is and that it should be tackled.

After sharing my dog's experience, the shelter cases here in Connecticut, the lack of awareness in the streets, and hearing about so many pet owners' experiences with heartworm disease, I would like to share my suggestion. First, I want to ensure that when these shelter dogs that are given a second chance at life will be treated to a healthy and happy life going forward. Secondly, I want to suggest a friendly reminder on the CT dog license for a SNAP test, which detects for heartworm and Lyme disease. There are many affordable clinics located across Connecticut,

specifically in Bridgeport, that offer this test. Putting this reminder on the dog license gives the owner insight about this test and how they can protect their pet. This is a perfect target for education, since if they are registering their dog they are ensuring its wellbeing. I spoke to a veterinarian who suggested that I personally stand at a table in my town when people are registering their dogs or at a clinic when they are going for their rabies test. Although, that is a good suggestion, I can only reach so many pet owners with that route. The biggest question here is: if we can take action and improve the welfare of animals in Connecticut by simply providing education in shelters and a reminder on the dog license, **why don't we?** I understand that money is tight, in this state and most others, but simply posting online fliers to be printed and hung in shelters or distributed with pet registration forms would increase awareness a great deal!

Our furry friends cannot speak for themselves. It is us up to us to protect their well-being. Let us be the state that other states follow. Let us take action on behalf of these animals.

Thank you for your time, and for allowing me to present this testimony before you today.

Sincerely,
Annie Blumenfeld