



March 17, 2014

**TESTIMONY OF LAURA "PEACH" REID ON BEHALF OF
PET INDUSTRY JOINT ADVISORY COUNCIL
SENATE BILL 445
BEFORE THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

As an organization that routinely supports legislative efforts to advance the welfare of animals and as a member of the recently concluded Task Force whose recommendations you are considering today, the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) appreciates the opportunity to express our concerns.

My name is Peach Reid, and I am the CEO of Fish Mart, the Northeast's largest wholesale distributor of aquatics and pets. I am very familiar with Connecticut pet store owners, whom I have been associated with for decades. I recognize and appreciate the committed entrepreneurs, tireless workers and compassionate pet owners who responsibly operate our state's pet stores. I sit before you today as a member of PIJAC's Board of Directors.

Nobody cares more about safe and healthy pet animals 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 in some states. PIJAC has worked closely with the USDA on effective implementation of the Animal Welfare Act for pets since its inception almost fifty years ago, and has joined hands with state agencies to ensure adoption and enforcement of appropriate regulatory standards. Our association has long been recognized as the voice for a responsible and humane pet trade.

As such, we have a tremendous depth and breadth of experience with legislative efforts to verify and certify the health and well-being of animals sold as pets from the time they are born all the way until they are taken home and made part of the family. We have a responsibility to the animals themselves, not to mention our customers. And it should be apparent that pet stores have a significant financial incentive to adhere to the highest standards of care and sourcing; they are dependent on their reputation and positive word of mouth to stay in business.

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Unfortunately, there are those who oppose the very existence of commercial breeders in the United States, and they believe that putting Connecticut pet stores that sell dogs and cats out of business is the best way to hurt those out-of-state breeders. This agenda was apparent throughout the hearings held by the Task Force, and you will continue to see it in today's testimony.

We at PIJAC are most concerned about three aspects of the Task Force recommendations which informed this bill.

First, it was recommended that any new pet store that opens within the state be required to source its animals exclusively from shelters, rescues and local breeders. We have several concerns with this recommendation. An arrangement of this nature would cast existing stores as second-class citizens and strips their stores of any long term value. They could sell or transfer their stores' licenses without making a fundamental and costly change in their business model. Simply put, they would be forced to change or close if they hoped to see any return on their investments into their stores over the years. Such an arrangement would create two types of pet retailers, subject to two different enforcement regimes, at a time when the state Division of Animal Control has already indicated that it lacks the resources to effectively enforce everything with which it is already tasked. Any attempt to limit pet stores to sourcing their animals from shelters, rescues and local breeders would REMOVE the existing protections offered by the USDA certification of sources who currently supply them; this would actually DECREASE the transparency and protection currently enjoyed by consumers and would also call into question the applicability of the state's existing warranty law (which does not apply to shelters or rescues).

Additionally, the Task Force recommended – and SB 445 includes – a provision that prohibits the use of breeders who have been cited for three or more indirect Non-Compliance Issues by the USDA in the previous two years, provided such violations pertained to the health or welfare of an animal. We support this in principle, and we would submit that refining the language in the bill to make this specifically applicable to indirect NCIs under sections 2.40 and 2.131 of the Animal Welfare Act would accomplish this.

Finally, we ask that you reconsider the extent of the expansion of the state's existing pet warranty law, which was just strengthened less than two years ago. While we wholeheartedly believe that consumers should be protected against the rare occurrences where animals are sold with contracted illnesses that have not yet manifest at the time of sale or hereditary conditions that were not readily apparent, we would like to point out that more than 20 states have warranty laws in existence and the vast majority have arrived at a *de facto* standard of reimbursement for veterinary costs up to the purchase price of the dog or cat. We would strongly encourage you to raise Connecticut's existing reimbursement rate to bring it in line with this national standard, but not to exceed it. We would also reiterate our recommendation that the state's warranty law be amended to include a provision for arbitration.

We at PIJAC appreciate the efforts of the Assembly to address the humane treatment of animals we bring into the lives of Connecticut's families. But we remain concerned about recommendations made by the Task Force that do nothing to address its intended target – bad out-of-state breeders who give the entire pet industry a bad name – while putting small, locally-owned stores out of business and forcing hundreds of pet store employees across the state out of work. We encourage you to reject any

amendment proposals that would seek to do just that. We believe Connecticut can be a leader in the push to improve conditions for all animals across the country, but you do not need to do so at the expense of your own constituents.

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

Sincerely,

Laura "Peach" Reid
Board of Directors, Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council
Owner and President, Fish Mart, Inc.