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## SB 445 ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

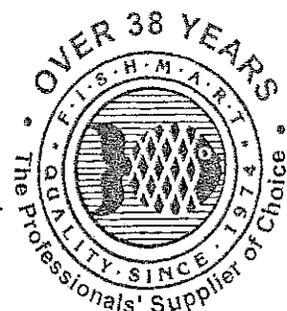
My name is Peach Reid, and I am the CEO of Fish Mart, the Northeast's largest wholesale distributor of aquatics and pets. I am very familiar with CT pet store owners, whom I have worked with for decades. These men and women – your constituents – are committed entrepreneurs, tireless workers and compassionate pet owners, not heartless capitalists who cut corners at every opportunity. I sit before you today as a member of PIJAC's Board of Directors.

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.

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 hear it in today's testimony.

It was recommended by the Task Force that any new pet store that opens within the state be required to source its animals exclusively from shelters, rescues and local breeders. This would be bad for new stores, old stores, and the state alike.

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- Fresh & Salt Water Tropicals
  - African Cichlids
  - Aquatic Specialties
  - Reptiles & Amphibians
  - Imported & Domestic Goldfish
  - Plants
  - Live & Frozen Foods
  - Small Animals
  - Birds



Any attempt to limit pet stores to sourcing their animals from shelters, rescues and local breeders would actually REMOVE the existing protections offered by the USDA certification of sources who 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). Existing stores would be forced to change or close, as they could no longer sell or transfer existing licenses without doing so. This 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.

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 that affect the health and well-being of animals. We 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, I would 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. Though cases are rare, occasionally animals are sold with contracted illnesses or hereditary conditions that were not readily apparent. 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. I 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 at PIJAC appreciate your efforts to address the humane treatment of animals we bring into the lives of Connecticut's families. But we remain concerned about attempts to pass legislation that does nothing to address its intended target – 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. 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.

Thank you for your time.