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Joint Committee on the Environment

Legislative Office Building, Room 3200
Hartford, CT 06106

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HB 5707: SUPPORT

Testimony by Kevin Chase, Vice President of Beagle Freedom Project

Dear Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on the Environment,

I write in support of HB 5707 from my professional experience in negotiating for the release of those animals no longer needed in research facilities.

In the 4 years that my non-profit Beagle Freedom Project has existed, we have saved over 300 dogs, (primarily beagles as this is the breed of choice for research because these dogs are so gentle, people-pleasing, and forgiving), two dozen cats, and countless rabbits, pigs, and ponies from labs in 35 different states and four countries. We have provided every one of these animals with top-notch veterinary care and placed them in a permanent loving home.

While we are proud of this small, but significant measure of success, the last few years have also exposed to us the **irregularities, policy deficiencies** and **discretionary protocols** that determine whether a dog or cat lives or dies at the end of the research process – even if they are healthy and no longer needed.

There is a deficiency of law with respect to post-research adoption opportunities for these animals that endure so much for our experiments. This law is needed because there exists *no* guideline or policy covering this aspect of laboratory animal welfare. Currently, federal and state regulations offer an array of protections concerning the animal's bedding, food, water access, enrichment devices and pain management. All aspects of a research animal's life is subject to policy prescriptions *except* for what happens to the animal after the research ends.

Right now, if a dog or cats is adopted out at end of the experiment, it is only at the individual discretion and volunteer time of a laboratory worker. There exists no mechanism for Connecticut citizens to adopt one of these dogs or cats for which their taxpayer dollars pay for.

My organization has primarily worked with the low-level animal care technicians in these academic facilities, and the rescue of the animals often depends on their ability to convince their higher-ups to let them adopt out the dogs and cats, and their availability to come in on their free time to do so. These vet-techs reach out to my organization because they are pained to see the animals they have cared for summarily euthanized at the end of a project. They usually have already exhausted all their personal resources, friends, and family connections trying to find homes for these unwanted dogs, and are in need of professional help.

HB 5707 recognizes the hard work that these vet students and research staff do when they can or are allowed, and would assist and supplement their efforts. My organization alone has over 6000 adoption applicants on a wait-list for such an opportunity. HB 5707 would simply facilitate a relationship between laboratories and the non-profit rescue community, so that if an opportunity does present itself to help some of these laboratory dogs and cats, it is not wasted. It does not state which rescue group they must contact. It leaves that to their comfort level in finding a qualified group they are comfortable working with. HB 5707 also does not dictate how the determination is made as to which dog or cat is healthy enough for adoption. It rightly trusts the veterinary staff of the facility to make this assessment.

HB 5707 enjoys bi-partisan support both politically as well as philosophically. While Beagle Freedom Project does maintain a policy position against animal testing, especially for cosmetics, **our work and this bill is about bridging differences** on this controversial issue to find ways to work together. Included in the support letters, you will find a testimony for Stacy Barnett, one such employee who works with dogs and other animals in a research lab. She has partnered with us to find homes for beagles that would have otherwise been euthanized.

Stacy identifies the need for this bill because as she says, these schools and labs are not kennels and lack the capacity to vet applicants and find homes. HB 5707 will spark this fruitful and literally life-saving relationship. This will save the research facilities time and money, as it invariably costs more to euthanize and dispose of a cat or beagle's body than it would to simply pick up the phone and call an organization like mine.

If some of Connecticut's research labs currently have informal adoption programs in place, that is admirable. I applaud this and wish all taxpayer supported research institutions did. **They don't though, and this bill will create an equal opportunity standard for adoption amongst them all.** Additionally, the programs that currently do exist, only do so discretionarily. These institutions could end their programs tomorrow, with no consequence except for those animals that could have otherwise been saved. This is a real concern. Without HB 5707 ensuring this protective measure, these programs could change as easily as personnel.

The number of animals in U.S. laboratories fluctuates yearly. Even if Connecticut has a low number of dogs and cats in taxpayer-assisted labs this year, this may not be the case next year. Having an established system in place going forward gives assurance of help to

the laboratories and more importantly those dogs and cats that could be candidates for adoption.

This bill is simple, but important. It does not meddle in the research process. It only provides a common-sense policy solution for which none exists so far. It recognizes that after all these dogs and cats endure for our drugs, products, and curiosities that they deserve a second chance at a life.

By voting for HB 5707 today, you will literally be saving lives and establishing Connecticut as setting the gold standard for research ethics amongst its proud universities and facilities.

Thank you for your time.

Kevin Chase
Vice President
Beagle Freedom Project