Bill No.: HB-7158
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGULATION OF COMMERCIAL KENNELS.
Vote Date: 3/8/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable
PH Date: 3/1/2019
File No.: 194

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Environment Committee


REASONS FOR BILL:

Section 22-327 of the Connecticut General Statutes defines “Kennel” as a pack or collection of dogs, and “Commercial Kennel” as a kennel maintained for boarding or grooming dogs or cats. The bill seeks to correct the inconsistency within the general statutes by redefining commercial kennel as a “place” maintained for boarding or grooming. However, by changing the definition of commercial kennel, the bill also affects the following statutes: 22-332a, 22-336, 22-380e, 22-380f, 26-49, and 49-70.

As a result, concerns have been shared with the committee that the bill would also affect people who offer dog boarding and grooming services either on their own, or through platforms such as Rover.Com.

Some have testified before the committee expressing public safety and public health concerns. These groups advocate that all animal caretakers, regardless of the number of animals in their care, should be licensed as commercial kennels and should adhere to the guidelines and requirements set forth by the Department of Agriculture.

Others have testified before the committee sharing concerns that the bill would negatively impact neighborhood dog sitters. These groups advocate for the definition of commercial kennel to exempt those taking care of less than five dogs or cats.
In addition to redefining a commercial kennel as a place, the bill also specifies that such place is one maintained for boarding or grooming more than three dogs or cats.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Melody A. Currey, Acting Commissioner, Department of Agriculture (DoAg): Provided comment on the bill. Although supportive of the technical change of the bill to define commercial kennel as a place, DoAg opposes providing an exemption for those boarding or grooming three or fewer dogs and cats. The department shared their belief that all people offering boarding or grooming services should be licensed in accordance with section 22-3449a) of the general statutes. Additionally, DoAg does not consider individuals who pet sit for friends or family as commercial kennels. The agency considers those who advertise the services offered by commercial kennels to be commercial kennels.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Carol Benesch, Owner, Norwichtown Pet Resort & Spa Inc.: Although supportive of the bill, the bill should be amended to remove the exception for unlicensed providers who host up to three dogs in their home. To provide care for pets individuals must have (1) appropriate sized kennels, (2) knowledge of how to clean the space to prevent diseases, (3) the ability to administer medication, (4) experience to handle a mixture of pet behaviors.

Valentina DaCosta and Timothy Ziegler, Owners, Captain Kitt’s LLC: Although supportive of the bill, the bill should be amended to remove the exception for unlicensed providers who host up to three dogs in their home. Shared personal testimony of how unlicensed providers have attributed to their business loss. Licensing is essential to ensure that all pets are cared for in a safe environment.

Fran Johnson: Shared personal testimony as a senior citizen who provides dog care services through Rover.Com. Not able to afford her own dog, Rover.Com provides her the opportunity to help satisfy her love for dogs and make extra money for unplanned expenses.

Monica Kolbusz: Shared personal testimony as a full-time engineer, and a part-time pet sitter and of the process to becoming a pet sitter on Rover.Com. After recently purchasing a home, offering pet sitting services through Rover.Com has allowed her to cover extra costs associated with home ownership. Rover.Com requires background checks, and the application was reviewed and approved by a Rover representative. Those advertising from the website receive regular feedback from their clients.

Lindsey Kupec: Homebased pet sitting has created economic opportunity for individuals in the state. Rover.Com has connected over 30,000 Connecticut pet owners and service providers. The Rover platform has improved transparency, safety, and accessibility of in-home pet care services for pet owners.

John Lapham, General Council, Rover.Com (Rover): More than 37,000 residents of Connecticut have registered with Rover. Rover requires background checks and assessments of potential providers before they list their services, provides access to Rover
Safety Team Members 24 hours a day, and offers $25,000 coverage per service for vet care or other needs. This bill, without the three dog or cat exception, will effectively ban in-home pet care. Additionally, the industry will grow the state’s economy. People listing services through Rover have earned $2.1 million in 2018 and are required by law to file 1099 tax forms. Finally, Rhode Island, Virginia, Colorado, and California have passed similar legislation exempting individuals who provide pet sitting services.

**Karren Nash:** Homebased pet sitting has created economic opportunity for individuals in the state. Rover.Com has connected over 30,000 Connecticut pet owners and service providers. The Rover platform has improved transparency, safety, and accessibility of in-home pet care services for pet owners.

**Senator Cathy Osten, 19th Senate Dist.:** This bill will ensure the licensure and regulation of commercial kennels while creating economic opportunities for those who care for pets in a home-based setting. For some, at-home pet sitting makes pet care more affordable and accessible, and have been shown to be ideal for pets that are older, anxious, ill, or can’t otherwise be boarded in a large kennel.

**Ana Rio:** Shared personal testimony of why she prefers using the services offered through Rover.Com. Her Maltese Yorkshire mix is afraid of other dogs and has had negative experience with large dogs. Her dog will never feel comfortable in any kennel type situation.

**Frederick R. Vogel, Owner, Severn Brodny Kennels, Inc.:** Although supportive of the bill, the bill should be amended to remove the exception for unlicensed providers who host up to three dogs in their home. Shared personal testimony of their loss of business to unlicensed care providers. Additionally, licensure is essential for ensuring that dogs and cats are cared for in a safe and clean environment. The Canine Control Offices should be able to inspect all pet care providers.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Representative Kim Rose 118th Assembly Dist.:** Although supportive of correcting the definition of commercial kennel, there should be no exceptions for commercial kennel licensure for the following reasons: (1) the exemption provision of the bill will place dogs in dangerous situations, (2) people advertising such services are operating a regulated business without proper licensure and inspection, (3) they do not require vaccination certifications from pet owners, (4) there is no proper insurance and liability is in question, (5) when advertising that the provider can administer medication, their qualifications are unknown, (6) it is unclear what background checks are performed for such providers, (7) these businesses are not approved by their local municipal zoning departments, (8) there are neighborhood noise complaints, (9) these businesses may not be paying taxes on their services. Testimony also provided review for Rover.Com from www.sitejabber.com.

**Reported by:** Pamela Bianca / Ussawin R. Bumpen  **Date:** 4/1/2019