

# Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6726

AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGULATION OF LIVESTOCK AND CERTAIN

**Title:** RABBIT PROCESSING FACILITIES.

**Vote Date:** 3/10/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/27/2023

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Environment Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Provide enhanced procedure by the Department of Agriculture on the regulations of livestock and authorize the Department of Agriculture to inspect rabbit producing and the processing facilities that produce and process rabbits for consumption.

## **JFS Language:**

LCO 5708 makes one conforming change in the language concerning livestock dealers.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

### **Bryan Hurlburt, Commissioner, Department of Agriculture:**

Commissioner Hurlburt testified that the bill contains significant revisions to the department's livestock statues that will reflect language changes from the United States Department of Agriculture on compensation and quarantine requirements. The Department of Agriculture supports Section 27 that allows for farmers to engage in direct sales. Previously we discussed the Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease that the USDA does not currently have an official program. We do not believe that this bill will result in an outbreak of this disease.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Joan Nichols, Executive Director, CT Farm Bureau Association:**

Ms. Nichols and the Connecticut Farm Bureau support the bill and the new Section 27. It is critically important that Connecticut Farms engage in livestock production. Section 27 creates a program through the Department of Agriculture to allow for on-farming process and further diversifies the variety of locally grown product available to consumers in an efficient and processing program. The program is similar to the successful Small Poultry Processor Inspection Program.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

### **JoAnne Basile, Executive Director, CT Votes for Animals:**

Ms. Basile testified that most animal lovers recognize rabbits as a household pet and are considered with dogs and cats. Industry leaders like Petco and PetSmart no longer sell rabbits instead have adoption programs. The Environment and Commerce Committees both had bills last year and they were resoundingly defeated.

### **Annie Hornish, Connecticut State Director, Humane Society of the U.S.:**

Ms. Hornish testified that Section 27 should be removed completely, Rabbits are smart, sociable animals and due to public demand, many cosmetic companies no longer test on rabbits. Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease is a concern for wild and domestic rabbits and was identified as an emerging risk in 2019 and is widespread in the western United States.

### **Susan Linker, CEO, Our Companions Animal Rescue:**

Ms. Linker and her members across the state expressed strong opposition to the bill. As a charitable organization that rescues, rehabilitates and adopts rabbits we do not think these family members should be treated as anything but family members.

### **Marge Peppercorn, MD:**

Doctor Peppercorn testified that as an owner of rabbits for many years they are extremely sensitive affectionate fragile beings who would suffer in a farmed environment. They should not be farmed or eaten.

### **Marlene Wilhelm, President, House Rabbit Connection:**

Ms. Wihelm testified that since 2000 rabbits as indoor pets have gone from 23% to 41%. Rabbits live indoors and most are litter box trained, house broken and have wonderful personalities. There has been a rise in the last several years to protect these animals including cosmetic companies no longer using them for testing and major fashion houses have gone fur-free. There is no "humane slaughter" and animals no the smell of death.

**Twenty-four sent the following testimony:**

I do not want my tax dollars used to promote the killing of rabbits. Remove Section 27 lines 797-811. Rabbits are smart and sociable animals with unique personalities and popular household pets. Due to demand may cosmetic companies no longer test of rabbits and may furriers no longer produce coats made from the pelts of rabbits. When Whole Foods tried selling rabbit meat there was public outcry resulting in the discontinuation of the sale of rabbit meat. This bill may exacerbate the spread of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV) a highly transmissible and fatal disease. Connecticut's Department of Agriculture should be promoting plant-based markets.

**Twenty-Six people also sent in testimony.**

**Reported by: Pamela Bianca**

**Date: March 15, 2023**