

POST MEETING TESTIMONY

Topic: "Ways to Improve the Puppy Industry and Ensure Healthy Animals in Connecticut"

Members of the Committee: I watched with interest all four hours of testimony at the October 16, 2013, hearing on ways to improve the puppy industry in Connecticut. Please accept this post-meeting testimony on behalf of a concerned hobby breeder living in Fairfield County. First, let me say that I am disappointed more breeders did not present testimony and also that the breeder on your expert panel could not attend this hearing because it would have been very instrumental to have her input in the question and answer sessions. I hope she will be a very involved member going forward and I also hope that she is an involved member of breed clubs and organizations which are historically known to educate and foster successful breeding with a direct emphasis on health, temperament, and function.

My name is Joe Vernuccio and I have been actively involved in the sport of purebred dogs for approximately 20 years. Fifteen of those years have been spent showing my own dogs and breeding litters occasionally to continue the hobby. I am a member of four breed clubs, one locally, and several others in other states and even one in the U.K. Most hobby breeders belong to at least one breed club where they initially are mentored and learn about the breed they are involved with. Hobby breeders usually prefer to exhibit and breed one specific breed—not multiple breeds, as may be the case with the out of state “breeders” who sell to pet shops. In addition, memberships in breed clubs require breeders to adhere to a code of ethics that include ethical breeding practices (for example, not breeding dogs that are unhealthy or not typical of the breed, not overbreeding a female, and not selling to pet shops). I have bred approximately 20 litters in 15 years on my own and in conjunction/co-ownership with other breeders—basically less than 2 litters a year. Our dogs have been successful either exhibited locally or at big venues like the Westminster dog show and even the World Dog Show in Scandinavia. Hobby breeders, like myself, go to great expense to have our dogs shown and although the media can sometimes depict these shows as vanity events, in truth, dog shows were created as a venue to have the dogs you have selected to eventually breed to be judged by experts who understand the specifics of your breed and also who understand sound structure. “Sound” dogs should be able to do the job they were bred to do and, additionally, sound dogs’ bodies are less likely to break down when dogs run, jump, and do the things they will do in a lifetime. Generally, dogs that achieve success at shows are often deemed good candidates for breeding.

Completely aside from the showing and traveling expenses involved, hobby breeders also put much effort, time, and money into producing prosperous and healthy litters. When a “reputable” breeder plans a litter, it includes studying pedigrees for many many hours and educating oneself of all the health problems within that specific breed—a reputable breeder is encouraged by their parent and local clubs to test all breeding stock for any and all diseases that are most common in that breed. The American Kennel Club (AKC) which is the main registry of purebred dogs in the U.S. initiated a Breeder of Merit program several years ago for breeders they deem to be the most conscientious toward health and that have had an established presence in the breed (their application is attached). Breeders of Merit, like me, are issued special registration certificates that highlight that the puppy named on the registration form (commonly referred to as a dog’s papers) was bred by a breeder of merit who adheres to all the health recommendations suggested by their national parent club—basically, it’s an unofficial rubber stamp of a litter. According to the AKC website, there are currently 239 Breeders of Merit in Connecticut and thousands more throughout the USA.

In my specific breed, Cairn Terriers, I personally have tests done on liver function via a dual bile acid testing, kidney function via ultrasounds done by board certified radiologists, perform a blood test for an inherited disease called GCL, test patellae for any luxation, and do yearly eye exams from canine optomoligists who are familiar with diseases in this breed. The costs for these tests can easily run over one thousand dollars per dog when initially done but escalate upward with follow up exams, which are done on eyes, for example, on a yearly basis.

When breeding a litter, most careful breeders consult reproductive experts to do progesterone tests to pinpoint ovulation and litter birth date, as well as numerous cultures to eliminate the threat of sexually transmitted diseases between animals. The vet offices of local reproductive experts are always full with breeders, appointments are hard to come by, and their expert services come at a premium price. Finally, the cost of C-sections, when required, and indeed always required in some breeds, are typically \$1500-4000 (the higher price being in the case of a weekend emergency surgery), and the cost to vaccinate puppies by a Fairfield County veterinarian is typically \$100 per puppy for an exam and puppy shot—puppies require at least 3 vaccinations before they are properly protected.

Since this was not touched upon in the testimonies first hearing, I thought that it was important to let the committee know all the varied expenses involved with showing and breeding correctly. Upon listening to testimony after testimony of individual pet shop owners saying that they had good relationships with the breeders that supply them puppies and that these breeders were like family members, I couldn't help but ask myself--how is it possible that these "breeders" can breed a litter so inexpensively that they can afford to sell puppies at a discount to pet stores so they could be sold for a profit eventually? In my experience, and what has been parroted to me from my mentors from the first day I considered hobby breeding is that "Breeding a litter should never be profitable and if you are making a profit—you probably aren't doing it right." Twenty years later, and from my own experience, I now parrot the same thing to this committee. It is NOT possible to test dogs for health, eliminate dogs that are not the best examples of the breed (health wise or not sound of mind and body), and to take the proper health precautions for a safe delivery, and reliably produce healthy litters and STILL make a profit enough to keep a business thriving. At the first hearing, the question was asked about what constituted a "reputable breeder"—first and foremost, a reputable breeder does not breed for profit, their primary concern are the dogs and that they will have good lives in their own homes or the homes of friends or an occasional puppy buyer. I was a bit confused when Senator Duff seemed to agree with the call from pet shop owners to "level the playing field" and impose the lemon law on rescue groups and reputable breeders. Rescue groups are doing amazing work with dogs that would be otherwise euthanized and it would be impossible for them to ever provide a guarantee on these animals. Rescued dogs are almost exclusively from pet shops in the first place—that is, rescues do not accept dogs that they can prove are from a local hobby breeder because those breeders will often or always take the dog back themselves when and if they are notified. Because a reputable breeder will indeed almost always take a dog back and give a refund to buyers that can prove by a vet check that the dog has a genetic problem or if they cannot keep a dog for another legitimate reason, a reputable breeder's guarantee is far more valuable to a pet owner than the lemon law that is imposed on pet shops. Pet shops are not a form of competition for rescue groups or hobby breeders—the two groups have vastly different goals—the pet shop industry is purely for profit—rescue groups and hobby breeders are driven by their passion for animals. To penalize the groups that are not making a profit and are primarily most passionate about animal welfare would be counter-productive to the task force's mission.

Finally, after all the time and expense a hobby breeder devotes to breeding a litter I have mentioned, it would be completely unheard of for one of those breeders to ever sell a litter of puppies that they raised and cared for as family members inside their homes to a pet shop to be placed in cages and sold to anyone who comes in the shop with a valid credit card. Furthermore, reputable hobby breeders don't need to sell to pet shops—hobby breeders get calls on a weekly basis from families in their communities and beyond looking for puppies. Puppies are typically reserved in advance of birth, sometimes even years in advance. Being involved with breed clubs opens this network for the hobby breeders, via the web or word of mouth. The suggestion that was made that pet shops could hopefully “work with” hobby breeders going forward in placing puppies was unrealistic because I am certain that will never ever happen.

Suggested Recommendation:

The committee has a huge task ahead. Given the current economic climate in Connecticut, I am not sure such a dramatic change as banning the sale of out of state puppies is an option that the committee can realistically make. Although I completely hate the idea that in most probability all or most of the puppies sold in pet shops in Connecticut today are probably from puppy mills or unethical breeders, I do not believe the purpose of the committee should be to put business owners “out of business.” Additionally, and as noted by committee member veterinarian expert Dr. Goldman, hobby breeders probably could never produce the volume of puppies the testifying pet shop owners say they sell in one year. Considering pet shop owners have also testified that they believe they could not survive on the sale or placement of animals from rescue groups via pet shops, I suggest that the most helpful recommendation from this committee to assist the Connecticut puppy buying public will be to impose a requirement for FULL DISCLOSURE. My suggestion would be a warning similar to that on a pack of cigarettes that states the risks that lie in that pack. Pet shops in this state should be required to post a state produced sign on the entry door and possibly one per every pet shop cage window wall that these puppies are from “out of state breeders and the owners of the pet shop cannot confirm that the puppies were individually raised and socialized in homes and possibly may have been bred in large production puppy mills” (or similar literature). I think pet shop employees should be mandated to disclose this information as well; otherwise the shop should be fined per individual case. Additionally, all bills of sale should be preceded by a “waiver” that must be signed by each potential buyer that they understand that the puppy they are purchasing is from an “out of state breeder and the owners of the pet shop cannot confirm that the puppies were individually raised and socialized in homes and that possibly was bred in a large production puppy mill.” If, after these clear notifications, they wish to purchase the puppy, it will have been a full disclosure sale instead of the lack of clarity offered by pet shops today. Give them full disclosure and let the buyer beware (Caveat Emptor). Could this be a compromise to improve the puppy industry in the great state of Connecticut?

I would be more than happy to answer any and all questions the committee has in the future.

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AKC BREEDER OF MERIT

THE HEART OF THE AKC

MISSION

In 2010, the American Kennel Club® established the AKC Breeder of Merit Program. It marked the first time since the AKC® was established over 125 years ago that a special designation of breeders was to be recognized. The purpose of the AKC Breeder of Merit Program is to identify and honor those breeders who consistently meet the high standards of the AKC and who actively promote the sport of purebred dogs.

QUALIFICATIONS

AKC Breeder of Merit Participants demonstrate a commitment to the AKC community, dedication to improving their breed, along with breeding dogs who are title winners.

Specific requirements include:

- Must have history of at least 5 years involvement with AKC events.
- Must have earned Conformation, Performance or Companion event titles on a minimum of 4 dogs they bred/co-bred.
- Must be a member of an AKC licensed club.
- Must certify that applicable health screens are performed on their breeding stock as recommended by the Parent Club. Be prepared to supply proof upon request.
- Currently in good standing with the AKC.
- Must demonstrate a commitment to ensure 100% of the puppies produced are AKC registered.

BENEFITS

Upon acceptance into the AKC Breeder of Merit Program you will receive:

- An AKC Breeder of Merit certificate and silver lapel pin.
- Your title of AKC Breeder of Merit Participant proudly showcased on all AKC registration certificates and dog applications, along with a distinctive gold border and AKC Breeder of Merit insignia.
- An announcement of your acceptance into the program on the AKC website.
- Free Online Breeder Classified advertisements.
- Breed specific banners for your personal website.
- A \$20 monthly credit toward AKC online reports.
- The Inner Circle Newsletter with The Breeder's Notebook: Advice from Breeders of the Year, AKC Breeder of Merit puppy photo gallery, and AKC Breeder of Merit profiles.

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Online: www.akc.org/breederofmerit

Email: breederofmerit@akc.org

Phone: 919-233-9767



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KENNEL CLUB®

8051 Arco Corporate Drive, Suite 100, Raleigh, NC 27617-3390 | 919-233-9767 | www.akc.org

AKC Special Services Department
 PO Box 900059 • Raleigh, NC 27675-9059
 Fax: 919-816-3770 • breederofmerit@akc.org



Customer # (Internal Use Only):

AKC® BREEDER OF MERIT PROGRAM APPLICATION

APPLICANT INFORMATION (REQUIRED)

First Name* Middle Initial* Last Name* (Previous Names) Date submitted*

Address Line One*

Address Line Two

City* State/Province* Postal Code* Country

Home Phone* Cell Phone Fax Number

Email Address* Website Address

My AKC Online Account User Name

Have you been the subject of an AKC inquiry in the past 5 years? Yes No If Yes, explain _____

If accepted, would you like your name published on the AKC website as an AKC Breeder of Merit participant?* Yes No

BREEDING EXPERIENCE

In what year did you breed/co-breed your first litter? _____

Do you currently perform health screens on your breeding stock as recommended by your Parent Club? Yes No

List all health screens you currently perform on your breeding stock, by breed...

Breed	Tests Performed	Parent Club Recommended?
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

COMPETITION & CLUB EXPERIENCE

In what year did you begin exhibiting dogs in AKC events? _____

List AKC licensed clubs of which you are currently a member.*

AKC Special Services Department
PO Box 900059 • Raleigh, NC 27675-9059
Fax: 919-816-3770 • breederofmerit@akc.org



AKC[®] BREEDER OF MERIT PROGRAM APPLICATION

TITLED DOGS

List AKC name and number of titled AKC dogs you have bred or co-bred.

1.

3.

2.

4.

*Required titles may be in Conformation, Companion, and Performance Events

SIGNING/CERTIFYING/SUBMITTING THE FORM

Read the certifying language and the Arbitration Clause at the bottom of the page. If agreed:

To submit this form to the AKC via email -

- Click the box that says "Click here to type your full name and submit via email." Once you have clicked this box, you will see a section to Enter Your Name.
- Please enter your full name in this field. This will be considered your electronic signature and will verify that you have read and agree to all the terms for the AKC Breeder of Merit Program.
- Verify that all required fields have been completed and all information is correct.
- Save a copy for your records.
- Click the "Click here to email to AKC." This will pop up an email box with the AKC Breeder of Merit email address.
- Click "Send."

To mail or fax this form to the AKC -

- Click the box that says "Click here to sign the form and submit via postal service."
- Save a copy for your records.
- Click the "Click here to print and send to AKC."
- Once printed, sign the form and submit it to:

AKC Special Services Department, PO Box 900059, Raleigh, NC 27675-9059 or fax to (919) 816-3770.

I hereby apply to participate in the Breeder of Merit Program. I certify by my signature that I have read, understand, and will comply with the requirements of the Breeder of Merit Program, including ensuring all dogs from AKC registered litters produced by me will be registered with AKC. I certify by my signature that all the information appearing on this application is correct, that I am in good standing with the American Kennel Club (AKC), and that I agree to abide by all AKC rules and regulations. I acknowledge that upon request I will be required to provide the AKC copies of recommended parent club health screenings applicable to the breed(s) for which I apply for Breeder of Merit Program participation. I acknowledge that any disciplinary action, including suspension or reprimands may be cause for removal from or denied enrollment in the program. By signing, I agree to the arbitration clause at the bottom of this page.



CLICK HERE TO TYPE IN YOUR
FULL NAME AND SUBMIT VIA EMAIL.



CLICK HERE TO SIGN THE FORM
AND SUBMIT VIA POSTAL SERVICE.

Each application for the Breeder of Merit Program will be considered on its merit. Applications will be verified through AKC records. The granting of Breeder of Merit Program participation is at the sole discretion of the American Kennel Club and is not guaranteed. The American Kennel Club reserves the right to reject an application or revoke participation in the Breeder of Merit Program after participation has been granted. Once submitted, the application and any supplemental materials become the property of the AKC. The Breeder of Merit Program does not imply a recommendation of a breeder by AKC.

ARBITRATION CLAUSE: I (WE) AGREE THAT ANY CAUSE OF ACTION, CONTROVERSY OR CLAIM ARISING OUT OF OR RELATED TO THIS APPLICATION OR AS TO THE CONSTRUCTION, INTERPRETATION AND EFFECT OF THIS AGREEMENT SHALL BE SETTLED BY ARBITRATION PURSUANT TO THE APPLICABLE RULES OF THE AMERICAN ARBITRATION ASSOCIATION, HOWEVER, PRIOR TO ARBITRATION ALL APPLICABLE AKC BYLAWS, RULES, REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES MUST FIRST BE FOLLOWED AS SET FORTH IN THE AKC CHARTER AND BYLAWS, RULES, REGULATIONS, PUBLISHED POLICIES AND GUIDELINES.