

Kess, Quinn

From: Casey [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, November 28, 2013 11:24 PM
To: CTPS
Subject: Support of Animal Welfare

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Resident of: Newington

Message Body:

My name is Casey, I'm an employee at a pet store that offers rodents, reptiles, and puppies, and I support animal rights to health and happiness. I support ethical pet stores, respectable USDA-certified breeders and kennels, no-kill shelters, and animal rescue organizations.

The task force and the staff, managers, and owners of pet stores can find common ground in one shared opinion; animals are valued life forms and potential family members, and they deserve the same basic rights to happiness and good health as humans. Each and every pet deserves a good, pleasant life, and while the task force has good intentions for the rights and health of animals, their ultimate goal to outlaw the sale of dogs and cats is misguided.

On a personal standpoint, animals are my purpose for living: reptiles, dogs, cats, rodents, you name it. My family adopted our German Shepherd mix from the Connecticut Humane Society in 2001 and he was my best friend through childhood and up to today. I also recently took home a 4-month old Puggle puppy from my place of work, All Pets Club, LLC. Aside from their origins, both of these dogs hold a piece of my heart and soul, they're happy and healthy, and they will always and forever be in my heart. In high school, I volunteered at a children's museum maintaining proper animal care to a variety of species from fish to ferrets to barnyard animals and everything in between. After high school, I moved on to enroll in a dog grooming course.

Before I was hired by my current place of employment, All Pets Club of Wallingford, I was skeptical of any store that sold dogs. The only words I heard like a broken record in my head were, "puppy mills, puppy mills, puppy mills." However, once I stepped into the store for my interview, I saw a moderately-sized group of puppies in well-sized, roomy pens, running and yapping and playing. The pups were having the best time of their lives. They had beds, toys, food and water available at all times, and one section of paper to use the bathroom. They were clean, bright, alert, and cute as a button. I thought there was no way there could be anything wrong here; these animals were living happily - in a pet store. Once I was hired, I came to conclude that my first impressions were correct. Behind the scenes, the basic care - from food and water to vet checks and medicines - were top-notch and no effort was left avoided. I make it my personal mission each and every day to do everything and anything I can to keep those little babies as happy and healthy as can be. As an employee of a pet store that sells dogs, I see each and every puppy as my own little angel. I remember all of them by name, I bathe them up and kiss their nose to say goodbye before they go to a good home, and sometimes even teach the older puppies tricks such as 'sit' and 'give paw.' I love my job, and I love my little angels.

Every morning I'm scheduled to work, I wake up with a smile - sometimes earlier than my alarms - for the sheer fact that I know I'll be seeing my angels again and spending 9 long hours with them all. Pet stores aren't the problem, so long as that pet store is very respectable and ethical in the care of their animals. My store, on a personal standpoint, fits that criteria, and I believe All Pets Club sets an example for how animals should be respected in proper care and attention so that they can be phenomenal members to a good family.

I also understand how terrible it is that SO many dogs and cats are left in shelters, abandoned, abused, and killed. However, I believe that pet stores are not to blame. I believe that if the store is responsible and strict in their animal care, they should be allowed to continue to offer healthy animals from decent sources. Another way, instead, to approach the pet over-population problem is to offer more education on animals and breeds that people find interest in and inquire about. A knowledgeable store or shelter staff would be able to, for example, tell an apartment-dweller that a high-energy sporting breed might not be the best fit for them, or that their favorite puppy would get too big for their living space as an adult. This way, the potential pet parent knows what to expect and can be encouraged towards an

animal or a breed that better suits their lifestyle. This, in turn, results in a happy animal, a happy pet parent, and minimal stress in a longer relationship between the two.

Moving on to the topic of 'puppy mills,' the term is interpreted on wider angles than it should. These days, anyone who breeds dogs is accused of being a 'puppy mill.' The term 'puppy mill' has no specific definition, but a rather accurate explanation came about during *Avenson v. Zegart* in 1984 as "a dog breeding operation in which the health of the dogs is disregarded in order to maintain a low overhead and maximize profits." In simpler terms, it means that a person will force sires and dams to reproduce litter after litter with higher intentions to sell off the pups rather than keep them and the parents healthy. In even simpler terms, it means backyard and commercial profit breeders. Not every breeding kennel runs this way, however; there are many family-owned and operated kennels with very high standards and practices that are respectable and respectful, and these are the kennels and families from whom many stores - my place of work for example - will conduct business. All Pets Club takes it up one more notch by working direct with our breeders instead of using brokers. This way we can always get in contact with the kennels for any questions, concerns, and clarifications. These are the kind of ethics that should be upheld in every breeder, kennel, and pet store alike.

Another topic that I've noticed the task force bring up is the fact that a lot of breeders and kennels are "subject to very weak and minimal USDA regulations." If this holds to be true, then I would fully support efforts to strengthen those regulations and operational requirements. This way, in order for a breeder to keep their license they must, by law, offer the essential care to dams, sires and litters, as well as their living conditions and transaction procedures. If breeding ceases all-together, and every single animal was spayed and neutered, it is true that shelter animals would no longer be a heartbreaking reality, but it would also mean that after all of those animals live their lives, we would no longer have ANY animals to love and welcome into our lives and families. Without educated and ethical breeding, we wouldn't have the health and variety of the many breeds we have today. I believe that the good breeders who care and respect their animals should be allowed to continue the breeds on healthy lives and living conditions, and the backyard and profit-focused kennels and breeders will no longer hold licenses, and therefore will be forced to shut down.

One other concern that I personally hold is about shelters that euthanize animals after a given time period or to 'make room.' With wider-spread animal education and further regulated breeding, the number of neglected, abandoned, or drop-off animals in shelters will decrease, and there will be less of a need to 'make room' by killing dogs or cats that still hold potential for being a wonderful pet. Adoption events, sites such as PetFinder.com, and social networking of homeless animals can help spread word and hopefully present more options to an animal instead of euthanasia, such as foster care or rescue organizations. I personally believe that "kill shelters" should be against the law, and more efforts can be made to help homeless animals and offer compassion and love.

I also support spreading the important message of spaying/neutering pet cats and dogs, because if pet parents aren't planning to breed their animals, they should be encouraged to spay or neuter to aid in the over-population problem and lower the chance of accidental pregnancies.

At the end of the day, every animal deserves a quality life and a happy home. Whether it be from a shelter, pet store, breeder, or rescue, there are furry friends everywhere waiting for the right family with which to cross paths. Instead of plainly banning pet stores as a whole from offering healthy animals, there are other options and goals for which pet stores, rescue groups, the task force, and all who believe in the basic rights of animals can fight. Together, all of us can make a change for happy, healthy animals.

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