



Gordon G. Willard
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Task Force on the Selling of Cats and Dogs in Connecticut Pet Shops Public Hearing

Sen. Duff, Rep. Kupchick and other respected members of the Task Force:

My name is Gordon Willard, Executive Director at the Connecticut Humane Society. I have been with the Connecticut Humane Society for three years and have headed animal welfare agencies for 30 years.

Thank you for accepting my testimony for today's public hearing.

This is a multi-faceted topic that requires considerable thought and consideration toward the safety and well-being of companion animals and would like to also thank you for pursuing an open discussion through your task force.

The "puppy mill" designation has been used exclusively to describe any breeding program but especially those that produce puppies in large numbers from dogs that are managed merely as biological manufacturing machines. The puppies are sold directly to pet shops or to pet brokers who supply the pet shop industry.

When one reflects on the motives of intentional breeding programs when associated with the goal of profit, issues of costs to produce those pets affects the level of profit earned by breeders, dog brokers and pet shops. Profit increases when costs remain low; a relationship that cannot be denied and has come to the forefront of the discussion. Certainly those who wish to eliminate the potential for abuse and ensure that all animals are cared for in a humane and caring manner have justifiable concerns.

In the past 35 to 40 years, pet owner perspectives have significantly changed. 92% of pet owners responding to surveys indicate that their pets are part of the family. The pet owning public while eager to adopt, purchase or procure a pet to expand their family is largely disassociated with the way puppies are manufactured in puppy mill operations and the ways breeding dogs are sustained.

The reality of puppy mill operations has been exposed time and time again through undercover reports leading to the necessity of consumer protections through pet lemon laws. It has been widely noted that Animal Welfare Act laws are wholly insufficient to protect dogs in puppy mill environments as is the

USDA's capacity to enforce those laws. It is also unclear to what extent fines and deterrents can be levied even if there is an enforcement action.

While those who do adopt from animal welfare organizations embrace the pets that they bring into their homes, animal welfare still only has approximately a 26% market share for dogs meaning that people secure dogs from sources other than animal welfare and rescue agencies 74% of the time. The pet store industry is reflected somewhere within that 74%.

Testimony provided at the first hearing of the Task Force would suggest that there are substantive deficiencies with the protections for puppy mill breeding dogs in the Animal Welfare Act and there is inadequate inspection and enforcement. The language of new laws becomes ambiguous and unenforceable when attempting to define sub-standard breeding operations which in fact may have led to the formation of our Task Force. The issues around how well – meaning people who want to bring a new dog into their home will be able to find a dog will also turn up in the discussion as will concerns about interstate commerce and restrictions on commerce within Connecticut.

The issues of commerce fall well outside of my understanding however the issues about providing humane care of dogs in puppy mill operations which may ultimately come to Connecticut, increasing the number of homeless dog placements from animal welfare and rescue organizations, and meeting the market demands of those who want a new dog are of concern to the Connecticut Humane Society. It seems logical at this time to consider looking at some of the following:

- Working with our congressional members to make changes to the Animal Welfare Act and to increase the USDA's capacity (and expectation) to enforce the provisions in the laws.
- Ensure that enforcement by the USDA is tied to adequate penalties to those who violate those standards
- Define provisions to represent a sub-standard on the types of breeding operations allowed within Connecticut
- Pay close attention to how any prohibitions will affect the movement of dogs within the internet market into the state or create an underground supply of dogs bred at undisclosed and uninspected breeding operations.

The Connecticut Humane Society stands ready to support ending inhumane treatment of any and all companion pets including those in puppy mill operations within our state borders and within other parts of the country. We will offer our input and energy to help end animal abuse and will work with the Task Force as it carries out its charge.