

Testimony for task force considering "Should Puppy Stores be banned in CT?"

November 20, 2013

I am a resident of Clinton, and will testify first in my role as an occasional breeder of Golden Retrievers, and second in my role as a professional epidemiologist.

As a responsible breeder, I take several steps to try to produce healthy and sound puppies. First, I am well acquainted with the pedigree of any female I plan to breed, and I carefully talk to the owner and study the pedigree of the prospective sire. I make sure that both sire and dam have been cleared by board-certified veterinary specialists to be free from hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, and certain inherited eye and heart conditions that can be problems in Golden Retrievers. I make sure that the dam gets excellent nutrition during the pregnancy, that the puppies are healthy at birth, that the puppies have excellent nutrition, and that they are well socialized with each other and with humans. The puppies must be vaccinated and examined by a veterinarian at the appropriate times. Potential adopters are carefully screened, and in fact almost all of my puppies go to homes of people I know. I give the adopters careful instructions about the care and training of puppies, and keep in touch with the adopters for some after the puppies are placed. As with many careful breeders, I make little money from the breeding, and in my case generally lose money.

When I visited a nearby pet store that sells puppies for profit, I found the procedures to be quite different. As one would hope, the puppies were said to have had the appropriate shots, to have been examined by a veterinarian, and to have been certified by the American Kennel Club (AKC) as being of a certain breed. However, no records of the presence or absence of inherited diseases of the sire and dam were available, and nothing was known of the conditions under which the puppies had been reared before being placed at the store. Many of the puppies seemed to be bought on a whim. Potential owners were not checked for suitability, or given much in the way of instructions. I have heard people who have bought puppies from pet stores say that because the puppies were from a "breeder" and "AKC-certified," they must be good puppies. However, as we know, there are good breeders and bad breeders, and the AKC is just certifying that by current standards the puppies are purebred, not that they are necessarily of good stock. The new owners are seldom aware of this.

Finally, as an epidemiologist I wanted to see if any actual studies had been done of characteristics of dogs purchased as puppies from pet stores compared to dogs obtained as puppies from noncommercial breeders. Such studies are difficult to do and all are somewhat flawed. However, perhaps the best of these studies was one published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* this past May (McMillan FD et al., Differences in behavioral characteristics between purebred dogs obtained as puppies from pet stores and purebred dogs obtained from noncommercial breeders, *JAVMA*, 242: 1359-1363, 2003). Dogs obtained as puppies from pet stores were more likely to have a wide range of undesirable behavioral characteristics compared to those obtained as puppies from noncommercial breeders. For instance, sexually intact pet store dogs were three times as likely to have owner-directed aggression as were sexually intact dogs acquired from noncommercial breeders, and pet store dogs were nearly twice as likely to have aggression toward unfamiliar dogs. Pet store dogs were also 30% to

60% more likely to have stranger-directed aggression, aggression to other household dogs, fear of dogs and nonsocial stimuli, separation-related problem, and touch sensitivity. Various outbreaks of infectious diseases have also been documented in pet store puppies.

Thus, on the basis of both my knowledge of good breeding practices and of the veterinary literature, I strongly urge that the sale of commercially-bred puppies in pet stores be prohibited. Such enterprises add to the pet overpopulation problem and produce more than their share of dogs with problems.

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