

Pet Store Industry Task Force Hearing

December 4, 2013

Good Afternoon.

My name is Ken Bernhard. I served in the House for eight years from 1997 to 2006 and I recognize some of you. Nice to be here again.

I am testifying today in favor of the proposal to prohibit the sale of puppies bred in facilities, which under any common sense definition, can only be called puppy mills or puppy factories. And, I say with almost complete certainty that any puppy sold in a pet store was raised in a puppy mill factory. Both the records at the Dept. of Agriculture and my fifteen years of research into the pet store and puppy mill business affirm a substantiated fact: no reputable breeder would sell its puppies to a wholesaler of dogs for resale in a retail store, whose sole purpose is to sell their puppies (their inventory) to the general public for profit. No reputable, responsible breeder who cares for the dogs they raise and live with would turn over their dogs' offspring to an unknown, commercial enterprise. Logic and the evidence confirm this truth.

The breeding dogs that live in barns and warehouses that produce puppies for sale in pet stores live under conditions, which if perpetrated by a Connecticut home owner, would result in charges being brought by the local animal control officer. These dogs live lives which none of us, if we witnessed it, would tolerate, much less perpetuate. These dogs are man's best friend. These dogs are the same as ones that brought us joy as children, were, and are, unrelenting faithful to us under all conditions during our lifetimes, that comfort us in sadness, guide and support our handicapped citizens, protect our soldiers, and are our companions in our elder years, AND yet, we permit a local pet store industry, that panders to this reality, to sustain, promote, and perpetuate another industry, puppy factories, that torture the breeding dogs.

Apart from the immorality of the puppy mill/ pet store collaboration, I would add a consumer protection caveat. In my legal practice, for the past ten years, I have provided pro bono services to the customers of local pet stores. There must have been thirty to forty pet store customers that found me and asked for my help. I can say unequivocally that these clients were victims of misinformation about where and under what circumstances their puppies were bred, the condition of the health of their pets, and in most instances had large, vet bills they had every reason to believe they would not have if they had been given truthful information at the time of their purchase. In my opinion, the pet store industry not only sustains a cruel industry that lives in the shadows providing their inventory, but in way too many instances misleads and victimizes its customers as well.

I ask you to pass the legislation that is under consideration and do what your heart tells you is the right thing to do, what your sense of morality tells you is the right thing to do, what your children, friends and family want you to do, and what, hopefully, will be the beginning of the end of a business, the wholesale breeding of dogs under horrific conditions, that embarrasses our claim to be a caring dominant species.