

TESTIMONY for TASK FORCE

Public Hearing of December 4, 2013

I am Laura "Peach" Reid, owner of Fish Mart located in West Haven CT. Fish Mart is a wholesale distributor of tropical fish and pets to retail pet stores throughout the northeast. We don't sell dogs or cats, so I don't have a direct vested business interest on the matter before us - but I have personally always had dogs and cats at home (dogs from pet shops, cats from both pet shops and shelters). I am an animal lover, be they pet animals or animals in the wild. I think all of us here share the common bond of having relationships of unconditional love with our pets, with all of us taking great care of the animals that we are entrusted with the responsibility of caring for.

I did visit some kennels two months ago in Missouri that do sell their dogs to some CT pet shops. I would ask each member of the Task Force to consider doing the same. I was incredibly impressed with what I witnessed – vast fields or huge pens for the breeders to run and play in, well-constructed house-like buildings for shelter in each field for these dogs, 24/7 access to clean water and food, heated pens for females and their puppies - and cages, when used that were much, much larger than the dogs in them.

Today I want to stay focused on a few key points

1) The charge of the Task force is to "study the proliferation of dogs and cats sourced from inhumane origins and sold in CT pet shops."

- To date in these hearings and in any available documentation from the OLR, I have yet to see any hard evidence of any such proliferation. We have heard some anecdotal incidents of problems, some from many years ago, but let's look at the facts. In 2012, CT pet shops sold approximately 7,000 dogs. By law, pet shops only solicit consumer complaints to the Department of Agriculture with posted signage. In 2012, the Department received EIGHT complaints of sick pet shop dogs. That is a complaint rate of 1/10th of 1%, basically statistically insignificant. If there was truly a proliferation of dogs and cats coming from inhumane sources to pet shops, that would surely result in many unhealthy animals, and there would not be such an amazingly low number of complaints to the state.

- There is no evidence of any kind as to inhumane sourcing of cats. The only source of cats to pet shops I am aware of is when members of the public bring litters to pet shops. Yet pet shops are still liable for up to \$500 under the Lemon Law Warrantee, even though they "sell" (more like adopt) these animals for the cost of the vet care. There are no cat breeding facilities or cat "mills" supplying cats to CT pet stores, and cats don't come from dog breeding facilities. So I hope the Task Force considers this.

CT pet shops can buy dogs from out-of-state breeders only if they are USDA licensed and inspected, which by the way, is something the AR folks championed years ago here in CT, helping make this state law. Now of course, the AR folks are saying the USDA isn't doing a good job with inspections and doesn't have enough inspectors – yet just a couple months ago when the USDA announced they would start inspecting internet breeders as well, the AR folks wholeheartedly and actively supported the USDA doing that (so apparently the USDA had enough inspectors to take on a lot of new breeders to inspect). These same AR folks are even now continuing to say the USDA doesn't have enough inspectors and they don't do a good job – yet they are citing USDA reports of violations as evidence. I hope everyone sees the blatant inconsistency here. The USDA is good/ effective or bad/ ineffective to the AR folks all depending on what point they want to make to drive their own agenda.

CT pet shops can also buy from in-state breeders, be they backyard/ kitchen breeders - who have no regulations or inspections - or licensed kennels (who have no regular inspections required). There are no USDA licensed breeders here in CT.

2) Regulatory changes in the last 2 or 3 years make for Continuous Improvement in the Sourcing of Pet Shop puppies.

Laws at both the state and federal levels have evolved, especially these last few years, into demanding sets of regulations for these breeding operations, focusing primarily on the welfare of the animals. The USDA now has many more inspectors than just a few years ago, and these inspectors have had upgraded training to conduct much more thorough inspections on more objective criteria. Additionally, these inspectors now have much more strict enforcement and more tools for enforcement, which has significantly reduced the number of USDA licensed kennels who can not or will not comply with the more restrictive standards and enforcement. (I have submitted some of the latest USDA updated procedural guidance for its Inspectors, including a clear, detailed description of any non-compliant items).

State laws enacted in the past few years in Pennsylvania, Missouri, Oklahoma and others – these states being among where the majority of puppies are obtained by pet shops – now have regulations that go far above and beyond USDA standards. I will refer you to the OLR report of September 6, 2103 you received, wherein 19 states have their own regulations, and even the HSUS is quoted as saying these state standards have more stringent standards than those set forth under [federal law]. Before I continue I must also correct the OLR report where Annie Hornish, CT Director of the HSUS, pointed out “that the AWA does not apply to Internet Sales made directly from breeders to the public.” That recently changed, as I noted above, with the full support of the AR community.