

Testimony
Task Force on Pet Shops Hearing December 4, 2013
Susan B. Linker, Chief Executive Officer, Our Companions Animal Rescue
Volunteer and member, CT Votes for Animals

Dear Task Force Members,

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in support of legislation that would prohibit the sale of commercially bred pets in Connecticut's pet shops.

I have been in the animal welfare profession for the last nineteen years and during that time I have seen many advances in the protection and welfare of animals. Part of these advances have been a growing awareness of puppy mills which source our nation's pet shops.

Let me be clear. No reputable breeder would ever sell their dogs to pet shops for resale. Pet shops source their dogs from puppy mills.

As people have been educated over the years about the horrifying acts of cruelty, exploitation and suffering that is inherent with puppy mills, and as people come to realize the sad limitations to the Animal Welfare Act requirements and the limitations to the regulations and enforcement of the USDA, more and more people have chosen to explore more humane options when adding a pet to their family. They include rescue and adoption and buying dogs directly from local breeders.

This public education and movement to the humane sourcing of pets is one reason why there are only a handful of pet shops left in our state that sell puppies.

As a professional in the animal welfare field, I take exception and refute claims made by pet shop owners about the quality and adoptability of dogs in the shelter/rescue system.

Lauren Kaufman from Puppies of Westport wrote in her testimony, "What activists won't tell you is that Pit Bulls constitute over 60% of the dogs that are euthanized and the vast majority of the rest are sad dogs that are either too old, too sick or too aggressive to be easily adopted."

This is not only untrue, but it is an unimaginably callous statement and speaks to the mentality that pets are objects of commerce and not sentient creatures who deserve kindness and mercy. At Our Companions we place hundreds of beautiful animals who are gentle-tempered, sweet-natured and are of all breeds, sizes and ages.

We charge \$150 to adopt a dog from Our Companions and \$75 for cats. All of our animals are sterilized, vaccinated, health checked, micro chipped, tested for disease, treated for internal and external parasites, any prior injury or illness and we follow up with training and behavioral support for the life of the animal. We also have a policy that, without question, requires us to take back our pets if the adoptions should not work out permanently.

That said, I am also here to object to claims that rescues are out to make money and get rich from their charitable work of the rescue and adoption of pets. Our operations are funded by public donations. We are not supported by adoption fees.

And, if all the dogs available for adoption are "sad, too old and too sick to be easily adopted" then how on earth are rescues making a fortune on them?

The time has come for our state to take the final step on a path that our community has been forging for many years to finally end the practice of supporting the barbaric operations of puppy mills.

Please support humane pet shop legislation. Connecticut's pet shops should source their dogs and cats only from rescues and shelters. If people want a purebred puppy, they should go directly to licensed breeders so they can confirm, first-hand, that the animals are bred and treated humanely.

At least 115 other pet stores in Connecticut have already decided not to sell cruelly-bred, puppy mill puppies. It's time that we require the other 15 stores to do the same.

Sincerely,

Susan B. Linker