

TESTIMONY FOR TASK FORCE ON PET SHOPS

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Testimony from Susan Ridge, Stamford, CT resident
Former board member for the Washington Animal Rescue League (www.warl.org)

Dear Committee Members,

I respectfully submit this testimony to you electronically because I cannot be there in person. I am truly sorry I cannot be there because I feel very passionate about this issue. I am strongly in favor of requiring Connecticut pet shops to obtain dogs and cats only from shelters and rescue organizations.

I am writing to you based on my experience as a former board member for a private shelter, the Washington Animal Rescue League (warl.org), in Washington, DC. I have seen firsthand the horrific conditions of puppy mills in this country. I have personally witnessed the filthy living conditions with crowded cages, covered in urine and feces, the lack of medical care for these animals, and the mentality that these dogs are nothing but breeding machines so that the puppy mill owner can make money. I know that over-breeding and inbreeding leads to nothing but significant health problems for the animals, and significant costs for the people who buy them. Improper socialization also leads to significant behavior challenges including shy, fearfulness, and different types of aggression. And then shelters are left to deal with these animals after people who buy them aren't happy and dump them at a shelter, or worse, leave them to fend for themselves.

These poor animals arrive in pet stores in unhealthy condition and with poor immunity to infectious disease. And pet stores often replicate puppy mill conditions in terms of healthcare and husbandry.

Since 98 percent of all puppies sold in pet stores come from puppy mills, according to the ASPCA, it's a business model based on animal cruelty. And it's no different in Connecticut.

Let me remind you of a couple more facts:

- The Humane Society of the United States estimates that 2 to 4 million puppy mill puppies are sold each year in the U.S.
- 3 to 4 million dogs and cats are euthanized in shelters each year due to the lack of homes, according to the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy.

At a time when 32 other cities in North America have already enacted such legislation banning the sale of puppies and kittens in pet stores - and promoting the adoption of healthy animals from shelters and other rescue groups - why wouldn't Connecticut want to make history by being the first state in the country to do so? To me, this is a no brainer, and other businesses have already made this their model. It's time for Connecticut stores to do so as well.

It's also been noted that there are "differences in behavioral characteristics between dogs obtained as puppies from pet stores and those obtained from non-commercial breeders," according to Franklin D. McMillan, DVM, DACVIM, James A. Serpell, PhD, Deborah L. Duffy, PhD, Elmabrok Masaoud, PhD, Ian R. Dohoo, DVM, PhD (Journal of American Veterinary Medicine, Vol 242, No. 10, May 15, 2013

Their conclusion? "Obtaining dogs from pet stores versus non-commercial breeders represented a significant risk factor for the development of a wide range of undesirable behavioral characteristics."

There are many reputable, responsible dog and cat breeders who refuse to sell through pet shops and who work carefully to screen families and ensure good, lifelong matches. And numerous shelters with healthy, adoptable dogs and cats who need homes. So why then do these pet stores need to sell animals when they can survive *and* thrive on a business model that sells other needed pet-related items. With so many household pets in this country - and the money that is being spent on them - these pet stores can make a difference in our communities by helping to address the pet overpopulation problem in this country AND make money at the same time. They simply do not need to sell dogs and cats and all they are doing is giving the puppy mill breeders a marketplace. This is a significant step to the overall issue of dealing with pet overpopulation.

Another reason to do this? You'll be protecting consumers. By banning pet stores from selling these dogs and cats you will:

- Protect consumers from inadvertently supporting puppy mills
- Protect animals from pet stores that often come with hidden health problems
- Protect taxpayers from footing the bill for pet overpopulation

The alternative is A Humane Business Model

Successful companies have adopted a humane business model by refusing to sell dogs, cats and rabbits. They form mutually beneficial partnerships with local rescues and humane societies to encourage adoption of shelter animals. More than 2000 pet stores in this country have taken a stand already. Let's help the pet stores in CT take a step in the right direction.

Thank you for considering this testimony in your decision-making.

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