



Testimony of

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Connecticut Votes for Animals

In Support of HB 6542, AAC Municipal Restrictions on Pet Shops

Before the

Joint Committee on Planning and Development

March 5, 2021

Co-Chair Senator Steve Cassano, Co-Chair Christine McCarthy-Vayhey, Vice Chair Senator Norman Needleman, Vice Chair Representative Christine Goupil, Ranking Senator Tony Hwang, Ranking Representative Joseph Zullo, Honorable Members of the Planning and Development Committee

On behalf of the over 5500 supporters of Connecticut Votes for Animals, I am submitting my statement in strong support of HB 6542, AAC Municipal Restrictions on Pet Shops. CT Votes for Animals is a grass roots, animal advocacy organization that supports laws which improve the lives of all animals in Connecticut.

For some time now CT residents have been trying to stop the puppy mill pipeline that starts mostly in the mid-west and works its way through CT pet stores and into the homes of CT residents. As too many pet parents find out, the cute little “doggie in the window” has cost far more than the thousand to fifteen hundred dollars paid out or store financed. Unfortunately, pet store puppies frequently come with underlying health issues – a product of overbreeding and breeding bad stock – that costs families many more thousands of dollars down the road and something that is incalculable -- heart ache to those for whom the pup has become an integral part of the family.

Puppy mill dogs has become a euphemism for dogs from a large-scale, commercial dog-breeding operations where profit is given priority over the well-being of the animal. People know it mostly about dogs, but it happens with cats and with rabbits too, the third most popular companion animal in the United States. And with the exception of the store owners, and perhaps a few former pet owners, everyone who thinks about it hates this type of breeding of companion animals. Without a doubt, pet shops and the sale of these cruelly bred animals is our single largest issue. Stopping the puppy mill pipeline is the issue year after year that CT Votes for Animals’ supporters care about most.

But I am not here to debate the good or bad of pet shops. That, we hope, will be a topic for another day and place.

Rather, we are here today to give voice to the many people in Connecticut who are frustrated because they can't have a conversation about this, because even when it gets close, it gets stopped. The most recent example was in 2019, when over 90 members of the House of Representatives agreed to support a bill to place a statewide ban on pet shop sales. Yet even with 90 assured votes, somehow the bill never was called. The pet shop lobby got to their friends who cleverly erected major obstacles to getting the bill called. Clever tactics allowed under the rules, so they win. But in the end, it is the people who lose.

So, what HB 6542 asks the legislature to do on pet shops is basically very little. You don't have to take a position on their value one way or another. You just need to let others at home have that discussion and make that decision.

There are over 350 communities around the country – over 125 in New Jersey alone – that have the authority to limit sales in their town and have done so. Just a couple of years ago, Stamford looked at the facts and was ready to make that decision. Until that they got stopped because of the threat of a costly laws suit. HB 6542 will remove the ambiguity so towns like Stamford can have a discussion and make a decision without any threat of legal expenses. Other towns have passed similar resolutions and many others are poised to do the same.

Notwithstanding what the critics of this bill say, HB 6542

- does not promote rescue dogs over pet store dogs
- does not disrupt a finely tuned, state centric regulatory scheme that protects the well being of dogs and the interests of the buyer
- does not remove state consumer protections --- those protections are there because the legislature put them there not because the businesses asked for them
- This bill does none of that.

HB 6542 does one thing. It kicks the can down to main street and says to local jurisdictions you make the decision. All of those arguments will be debated on Mainstreet, a place where residents are ready to make their case before their local governments who are accountable to them.

We don't know the outcome of those debates. But we are willing to take the risk. CVA urges the Planning and Development Committee to let it happen. Justice comes in many forms. Today it comes in the form of HB 6542.

CT Votes for Animals would like to align itself with the changes suggested by Annie Hornish of the Humane Society of the US. Those changes recommend a more suitable section for the placement of the Committee language. We agree with the options presented to the Committee in her testimony.

We respectfully request the Planning and Development Committee pass this bill.

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