



Statement of  
Jo-Anne Basile, Executive Director  
CT Votes for Animals  
In Support of HB 5386  
Before the  
Joint Committee on the Environment  
March 1, 2019

Senate Co-Chair Cohen, House Co-Chair Demicco, Vice Chairs Senator Kushner and Representative Gresko, Ranking Senator Miner and Ranking Representative Harding, Honorable Members of the Environment Committee.

CT Votes for Animals (CVA) is a grass roots animal advocacy organization representing 3,000 citizens across the State of Connecticut. CVA members care deeply that Connecticut provides a safe and humane environment for all its animals. CVA speaks up for animals as a reminder to the public that a compassionate world is good for all and one in which we all should want to live in.

CT Votes for Animals strongly supports passage of HB 5386 to Prohibit the Sale of Dogs, Cats and Rabbits at CT Pet Shops. This bill aims to stop the retail sale of dogs, cats, and rabbits from “commercial breeding facilities (known as “puppy mills”, “kitten factories”) and to help promote and encourage the availability of shelter animals in Connecticut as a source for adoption.

The bill before the Committee satisfies most of what is needed for a successful initiative. There are a few adjustments to the language, however, that must be made to ensure that the bill meets its objectives. Recently CVA and other animal welfare organizations were made aware of a new scheme to falsely pose mill animals as rescues and sell them through pet stores in California. While disturbing it is not expected. When profits are at stake there is always the risk that bad actors will show up to manipulate the system. We believe, however, that this can be easily remedied. Several options are already under consideration to modify the definition of animal welfare rescues that will have the needed effect of closing the loopholes. This scam was discovered in San Diego California and we were told by the California bill’s principal sponsors that it is not widespread and is easily rectified. In this instance, Connecticut is fortunate not to be first...this way we have the benefit to learn from the experiences of California, Maryland and over 250 local communities that enacted retail pet sale bans.

Contrary to what some may think and say, the animal welfare community is not out to get the pet shops in CT. We don’t want to put CT’s 12 stores out of business. We just want them to change their business model. More than 100 stores around the State...from the big chains like Petco, PetSmart and Pet Value to small, independent stores have discovered that selling supplies and partnering with rescues is good for business. Why do you think stores like Petco, PetSmart, Value Pet don’t sell companion animals? It’s not because they don’t want to make a profit. These stores chose

not to make a business out of selling dogs and cats; instead they made a business out of selling good will. They figured it out and I trust Connecticut's 12 stores can do the same.

Like other industries confronting change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, pet stores need to update their business model to reflect the values in the State and the growing trend away from businesses that supply pets. CVA believes these stores will garner support from a whole group of new customers if they no longer sell dogs, cats and/or rabbits. The Committee may find it interesting that some rescues have already been contacted by at least one CT Pet Store and asked about collaborating with them as a result of the nation-wide trend away from pet stores selling commercially bred cats, dogs and rabbits. CVA recognizes to make this change takes time and so we support a reasonable transition period for these stores to move into this new business model.

From the work done 5 years ago we know that the majority of CT citizens would be horrified if they saw the conditions under which animals exist in commercial breeding facilities. Five years ago, this Committee looked into the puppy mill issue. That investigation generated a great deal of information particularly about the commercial breeders being used by CT pet stores. A copy of the report can be found here:

[https://www.cga.ct.gov/env/tfs/20130925\\_Task%20Force%20Concerning%20the%20Sale%20of%20Cats%20and%20Dogs%20at%20CT%20Pet%20Shops%20from%20Inhumane%20Origins%20\(Archive\)/20131204/Testimony%20-%20Karen%20Rasmussen.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/env/tfs/20130925_Task%20Force%20Concerning%20the%20Sale%20of%20Cats%20and%20Dogs%20at%20CT%20Pet%20Shops%20from%20Inhumane%20Origins%20(Archive)/20131204/Testimony%20-%20Karen%20Rasmussen.pdf) . Much of the information is archived and available through the Committee's page on the legislative website.

The 2014 law passed was a compromise, less than perfect to many, but it granted transparency about the dogs sold in CT pet stores. The Department of Agriculture never had the manpower to implement the law; to their credit they followed up on every complaint about dogs being sold from out of state puppy mills which were out of compliance. But to get the information that generated the complaints required hundreds of hours from tireless volunteers who looked through the hundreds of certificates of origin that came to the CT Department of Agriculture. Volunteers then checked with USDA's on-line resource of AWA (Animal Welfare Act) inspections and matched the puppy mills used by CT stores to be sure they were in compliance. As you are probably aware, the USDA on-line resource has been shut down since 2017 making CT's pet shop law virtually impossible to monitor or confirm compliance.

Many of you are loving pet owners and I know you would be horrified if you saw where, and the conditions under which, these dogs are bred. Seeing the cute puppies in the CT stores belies the horror that the breeding female and male withstand in places like Missouri, Kansas, Pennsylvania and Ohio. CT doesn't have USDA approved commercial breeding facilities so you can't take a field trip for an up close and personal look. Don't be persuaded that the term USDA certified breeder equates with quality. The fact that someone has a USDA license does not provide any assurance of humane breeding practices and certainly doesn't promise the health or quality of puppies purchased. Sadly, the USDA has 115 inspectors in charge of over 12,000 facilities across the country. That means that each inspector is in charge of around 104 facilities that range from dog breeding operations, factory farms, animal testing facilities, zoos and even transport vehicles.

The [United States Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA) only minimally enforces standards of care as specified in the Animal Welfare Act. A February 26, 2019 Washington Post article reveals that USDA inspections have plummeted: "USDA inspectors documented 60 percent fewer violations at animal facilities in 2018 from the previous year, in what animal protection groups say is the latest sign of weakened enforcement by an agency charged with ensuring pet breeders, research labs, zoos and other exhibitors follow federal animal welfare laws."

People are fooled into believing that USDA-certified breeders have dogs that are well treated and healthy. USDA standards under the Animal Welfare Act are very low – the bare minimum. A dog can be kept in a cage sized at only 6 inches longer the dog in each direction. Think about your own dog. Do you think those conditions are ok? For 24 hours/7 days a week/ for the rest of its life? These animals are sentient beings. We know they feel emotions, respond to pain and dogs in particular, crave the attention of humans.



Following is a sampling of some of the USDA Certified standards of care that breeders meet:

- A dog’s primary enclosure is required to be only six inches larger than the dog on all sides.
- Wire flooring permissible.
- Stacked cages permissible
- There doesn’t have to be any day light – plain lightbulbs – lit 24/7 -- are just fine according to the USDA standard
- Contact with other dogs or humans is minimal...and dog contact can be a substitute for no human contact.
- Bedding OR “other methods of conserving body heat” (e.g., a solid resting board) required only when the indoor ambient temperature is below 50 degrees

The pictures below are taken from a 2013 report “Based on testimony submitted to the Task Force Concerning the Sale of Cats and Dogs at CT Pet Shops from Inhumane Origins by Karen Rasmussen, Wilton, CT 12/4/2013”. A copy of the full report can be found here [https://www.cga.ct.gov/env/tfs/20130925\\_Task%20Force%20Concerning%20the%20Sale%20of%20Cats%20and%20Dogs%20at%20CT%20Pet%20Shops%20from%20Inhumane%20Origins%20\(Archive\)/20131204/Testimony%20-%20Karen%20Rasmussen.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/env/tfs/20130925_Task%20Force%20Concerning%20the%20Sale%20of%20Cats%20and%20Dogs%20at%20CT%20Pet%20Shops%20from%20Inhumane%20Origins%20(Archive)/20131204/Testimony%20-%20Karen%20Rasmussen.pdf) While the photos may be older we all know they are not atypical of what is found in puppy mills around the country today.



CVA recognizes the task before this Committee is not an easy one. But we are ever hopeful that the Committee understands that there is a path forward that will be humane, relieve the suffering of thousands of animals, find loving homes for those that have non and be good for CT's business. CVA is available to help the Committee forge that path forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views on this significant legislation, HB 5386.

On a personal note, below is my adopted dog Mack. I adopted him last year. He is 10.5, mostly deaf and blind since age 6 – according to the surrender information because of a genetic defect. Mack was bred by a Midwest USDA Certified breeding facility called Dot's Dogs; he was purchased at All Pet's Club Branford. The breeding dog had many other dogs before and after Mack who went to good, unsuspecting homes. His condition raises the question: How many of Mack's litter mates are also blind?

