

General Law Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5112

AN ACT PROHIBITING PET STORES FROM PURCHASING OR PROCURING

Title: DOGS, CATS AND RABBITS.

Vote Date: 3/12/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Environment

PH Date: 2/10/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Amy Morrin Bello, 28th District

Rep. Gary Turco, 27th District

REASONS FOR BILL:

There has been concern in Connecticut for a number of years regarding the sources that pet stores procure their animals from. Some pets are sourced from breeders with poor track records pertaining to the standard of care their animals receive; these breeders are colloquially referred to as 'puppy mills'. These puppy mills are considered to prioritize profit over the welfare of the animal under their care which often leads to these animals being malnourished, diseased, and psychologically traumatized. Often, these conditions are unknown to the purchaser of the pet until after the transaction has been completed.

This bill is designed to protect both the aforementioned purchasers and the pets themselves. By prohibiting the sale of dogs, cats, and rabbits in pet shops, the legislation hopes to cut off a revenue pipeline for these puppy mill operations. This legislation seeks to redirect prospective pet owners towards adoption at rescues or shelters, which are non-profits, and to ensure that each pet receives the proper standards of care in order to foster the healthiest pets possible.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Bryan Hurlburt, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, General Comments:](#)

Comm'r. Bryan Hurlburt offers comments on existing regulations pet stores are under and the implications this proposed legislation would have on those regulations. Currently, pet stores must provide veterinary checkups on animals every fifteen days until the animal is sold.

Furthermore, the commissioner notes pet shops must provide reimbursement for medical costs or replacement of an animal if that animal "becomes ill within twenty days of the sale or if they are diagnosed with a congenital defect that will affect [the animals] health within six months of sale." Under the new bill Comm'r. Hurlburt notes some uncertainty as it relates to pet shops hosting animals from shelters or rescues. He explains that rescues and shelters do not need to provide the same protections for consumers, so it is unclear if these pets would be covered under existing regulations. He also raises concerns as to whether it is the pet shop hosting, or the rescue itself that is obligated to provide care to the animal.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

James Bias, Executive Director, Connecticut Humane Society, Supports:

James Bias supports this legislation on behalf of the Connecticut Humane Society. He argues while most stores claim they receive pets only from USDA approved breeders; this claim is misleading since these inspections do not reveal the whole story about an organization's breeding practices. Moreover, he notes that "he is yet to see" pet shops that have proposed legislation to place more formal regulation on their industry.

Robin Cannamela, President, Desmond's Army, Supports:

Robin Cannamela is testifying in strong support of this bill. To emphasize her support, she tells the story of a rabbit being purchased in a pet shop and being maliciously killed. She notes that the clerk of the store testified that the individual that maliciously killed this rabbit frequently visited the pet store, opening up speculation as to the condition of the other animals this individual purchased. To stop cases like this, Ms. Cannamela argues a ban, like this legislation proposes, should be put in place.

Rep. Nicole Ditria, 105th District, State Representative, Supports:

Representative Ditria supports this bill to cut off the pipeline that puppy mills use as a source of revenue. Rep. Ditria argues that most reputable breeders would not sell their animals to pet stores giving 'puppy mills' a valuable profit lifeline. Rep. Ditria asserts that pet stores do not necessarily need to sell pets directly to be profitable noting PetSmart and Petco as successful business models. Through the passage of this bill, Rep. Ditria believes that Connecticut can reduce cruel puppy mill breeding practices and hopefully redirect individuals who would normally buy from pet stores towards adoption.

John & Mark Halan, Board Member, Pet Animal Welfare Society of Connecticut, Supports:

Mark & John Halan are in general support of this bill; they note that they want legislation similar to the bill introduced by New York State Senator Mike Gianaris and Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal. In addition to banning the sale of pets in pet stores, this bill increases sentencing for animal abusers, mandates a class for students in proper pet care, and includes many subsidies for animal health including those for rescues, veterinary care, and grooming.

Annie Hornish, CT State Director, Humane Society of the US, Supports:

Annie Hornish is testifying on behalf of the Humane Society U.S. (HSUS) which is in support of this bill. Like other testifiers, HSUS notes the cruel breeding practices that puppy mills practice. Additionally, HSUS adds that many pet stores provide misleading information about

the origin of their puppies. These pet stores often claim they work with only well-regulated and humane breeders when this is not always true. This raises the potential that these pet stores are selling animals that "place the public at risk of contracting zoonotic diseases." Furthermore, HSUS notes that pet stores often engage in predatory lending practices, promising customers third party financiers that offer low interest rates. Unfortunately, these offers are often misleading, and these stores attempt to "rush customers through paperwork."

Sharisse Kanet, Professor of Philosophy, Worcester State University, Supports:

Professor Kanet hopes to provide additional context, in addition to the often-noted conditions of puppy mills, as to why this legislation should be passed. Professor Kanet considers the current staffing levels in the Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAg) as insufficient to identify and enforce any sort of regulation against breeders who house animals in poor conditions. Moreover, if any animal is imported from out of state directly to a pet shop, current laws do not give Connecticut any ability to control that sale.

Kirsten Mende, CEO & Co-Founder, Lucky Dog Refuge, Supports –

Kirsten Mende pushes back on the comparison between animal rescues and pet shops being "competitors". The key difference is that, unlike pet stores, shelters and rescues are non-profits; therefore, making the comparison erroneous. Ms. Mende further emphasizes her support for the bill by recounting an anecdote of a puppy from a known puppy mill coming into her shelter. Despite claims from the shop that they only buy from USDA approved breeders, the animal's records suggested otherwise.

Jennifer Walker, Muddy Paws Barkery, Owner, Supports:

Jennifer Walker testifies in strong support of this bill. She notes the horrific conditions of puppy mills and the health conditions that many of these animals suffer from. She gives a personal anecdote of her own dog, unknowingly purchased from a puppy mill, to emphasize the harmful effects practices like inbreeding, which is a typical practice of puppy mills, have on the health of the animal.

Marlene Wilhelm, President, The House Rabbit Connection Supports:

Marlene Wilhelm notes that selling rabbits in pet stores encourages customers, who are not prepared to take care of a pet, into purchasing one haphazardly. Specifically, she notes many individuals buy rabbits for easter gifts, not understanding the commitment that these animals actually need to be raised successfully. She is calling for a statewide ban on the sale of these animals in pet shops as is proposed by this legislation.

Bill Ketzer, Senior Director of Government Relations Eastern Division, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Supports:

Bill Ketzer is testifying on behalf of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in support of this bill. ASPCA notes that the claims of strict regulation for pet stores selling animals are misleading. ASPCA argues that breeders can be in full compliance with the law while still leaving animals in horrific conditions. Furthermore, he notes Connecticut companies that have recently been cited for procuring dogs originating from 'puppy mill' type environments. He provides a plethora of other statistics that give evidence that this practice is ongoing and prevalent in the state of Connecticut.

Two hundred sixty-five members of the public testified in support of this bill primarily to stop the breeding practice commonly referred to as 'puppy mills.' A good portion of these

individuals spoke out against the poor conditions these breeders place animals under which can lead to poor health, malnutrition, and psychological trauma, along with other undesirable effects. They contend these breeders are only concerned about profits rather than the welfare of the animal. Moreover, pet stores themselves encourage "impulse purchases" of animals, which raises the likelihood that animals will be abandoned. By banning the sale of cats, dogs and rabbits at pet stores the rate of animal abandonment could be reduced and the revenue source for puppy mills could be greatly diminished. Furthermore, the passage of this bill could have the effect of redirecting consumers to shelters, which would increase the rate of adoption.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

A to Z Pet Shop, Oppose: The individuals listed below stand in opposition to the proposed legislation as affiliates of A to Z Pet Shop. Affiliates of this organization note the excellent care their shop provides to each animal and to the customers looking to purchase them. They assert that A to Z Pet Shop is passionate about ensuring they follow every regulation to guarantee their pet shop is running up to established codes. Furthermore, they note their passion and commitment to providing customers with quality choices and service to help them choose the right pet.

[Faith Fleming, A to Z Pet Shop LLC, Opposes](#)

[Tara Fleming, Owner, A to Z Pet Shop LLC, Opposes](#)

[Abigail Scott, A to Z Pet Shop LLC, Opposes](#)

All Pets Club, Oppose: The individuals listed below oppose the proposed legislation on behalf of All Pets Club. They note the potential unintended consequences the proposed legislation, if passed, could bring about. They argue if pet stores are prohibited from selling pets many could lose revenue, and some may be forced to close; this would create negative externalities for the entire Connecticut economy. Moreover, this legislation could increase the black market for unregulated pet sales; some speakers cite California's law as an example of this trend. Overall, each speaker affirms the positive role that All Pets Club plays for the pets themselves, and the consumers looking to purchase one.

[Jerry Pleban, President, All Pets Club, Opposes](#)

[Edmond Foucault, Co-owner, All Pets Club, Opposes](#)

[Janice Pleban, Customer, All Pets Club, Opposes](#)

[Jack Burton, Employee, All Pets Club, Opposes](#)

[Linda Watson, Customer, All Pets Club, Opposes](#)

[Justine Flores, Customer, All Pets Club, Opposes](#)

Chris Carty, Owner, The Dog House Opposes:

Chris Carty is testifying in opposition to this bill via his role as Owner of the Dog House. Carty pushes back against the claims that his pet store gets their animals from unscrupulous breeders. He notes there were regulations drafted in 2013, through a task force commissioned by the Environment Committee, which his store strictly adheres to. He notes that his staff ensures the best nutrition and medical care for each pet that comes into the store.

CT Breeder, Opposes:

The affiliates of CT Breeder listed below testified in opposition to this bill. They noted their store consistently follows all CT Regulations and ensures maximum transparency for

individuals purchasing a pet from their store. Like other testifiers, they note the increased risk of backyard and unlicensed breeders becoming more prominent if this legislation is to pass.

Gary Nudelman, President, CT Breeder, Opposes
Allison Graham, Manager, CT Breeder, Opposes

Michaelann Cox, Longshore Southport Kennel Club, Opposes:

Michaelann Cox argues that the results of this bill will be counter to its intended purposes. Instead of increasing "animal welfare", this bill would promote import of "rescue" pets from foreign countries who are underregulated and potentially carry dangerous diseases like rabies. Overall, Cox is concerned about the unregulated market this bill would create and that the bill reduces consumers choice.

Robert Forbes, Transitional Specialist, Hope Academy, General Comments (Leans Oppose):

The Hope Academy, where Robert Forbes works, provides services for students with disabilities. This school has partnered with Safari Stans Pet Store in the past for field trips and internships. Mr. Forbes notes these have been some of the most popular trips that the school offers.

Stacey Ober, Manager of Government Relations New England, American Kennel Club, Oppose:

Stacy Ober is testifying on behalf of the American Kennel Club in opposition to the proposed legislation. She argues that consumers choice should not be limited "arbitrarily." She pushes back on the argument that pet stores engage in predatory lending practices noting that Connecticut General Statutes (section 22-354 A) restricts individuals from making payments for pet over "a period of time." Additionally, she argues against the notion that shelters are overflowing due to pet store abandonment. Instead, she asserts it pets who are classified as rescues but often imported from foreign countries that are actually causing the shelter overflow.

Petland, Opposes: The following advocates for Petland testified in opposition to the proposed legislation. They argue that similar legislation passed in other states has proven unsuccessful in halting the momentum of puppy mills. Specifically, California is used as a case study; after similar legislation was passed, ninety-three percent of pet stores selling puppies went out of business and animal related scams rose by three-hundred fifty percent. Ultimately, these advocates argue that pet stores promote economic growth and give consumers more choices. Instead of banning pet stores from selling cats, dogs and rabbits, these advocates argue that Connecticut should strengthen enforcement of existing regulations.

Elizabeth Kunzelman, Petland, Opposes
Mike Voinovich, CFO, Petland, Opposes

Pet Advocacy Network, Opposes

The speakers from Pet Advocacy Network listed below testified in opposition to the proposed legislation. Alisa Clements, in particular, argues that instead of eliminating "bad actors," it takes away a transparent source of pets. Moreover, the passage of this bill would be bad for Connecticut's economic prospects. Currently, each pet store is held to strict regulatory standards and eliminating them as permittees to sell pets would only increase the backyard breeding market, which does not hold itself to such standards.

[Alisa Clements, Deputy Director of Advocacy, Pet Advocacy Network, Opposes](#)
[Alyssa Hurley, Vice President of Government Affairs, Pet Advocacy Network, Opposes](#)

The Puppy Palace, Opposes: The individuals listed below represent The Puppy Palace testified in opposition to the proposed legislation. Many who work for the company note adoring their occupation and the opportunity to promote the wellbeing of the animals they sell and reiterate the fact that they only work with licensed well-regulated breeders. Many testifiers argue that The Puppy Palace provides consumers a variety of well-taken care of pets to choose from. Furthermore, they offer customers a three-year warranty for any animal which has "congenial or hereditary health issues," which is much longer than the state mandated six months.

[Nicole Bernier, Kennel Manager, The Puppy Palace, Opposes](#)

[Holly Marvuglio, Manager, The Puppy Palace, Opposes](#)

[Constantions Phillippopoulous, Kennel Attendant, The Puppy Palace, Opposes](#)

[Loui Soteriou, President, The Puppy Palace, Opposes](#)

[Shelia Soteriou, Chief Operating Officer, The Puppy Palace, Opposes](#)

[Troy Soteriou, Pet Counselor, The Puppy Palace, Opposes](#)

[Anna Tilghman, Pet Counselor, The Puppy Palace, Opposes](#)

[Johnathan Tilghman, Kennel Attendant, The Puppy Palace, Opposes](#)

[Briona Zimmitti, Pet Counselor, The Puppy Palace, Opposes](#)

Tim Phelan, President, CT Retail Network, Opposes:

Tim Phelan is testifying on behalf of CT Retail Network in opposition to this legislation. He argues this proposal has the ability to cause economic disruptions, reduce the options consumers have to purchase pets from reputable sources, has the potential to cost pet store employees their jobs, and replaces reputable regulated breeding sources with an unregulated market.

Mark Samaan, Owner, All American Breeders, Opposes:

Mark Samaan is a small business owner in Stamford. He asserts that his store practices responsible breeding practices and this law would only cost consumers choice and his employees their jobs. Instead, he believes Connecticut should put emphasis on establishing stricter regulations for pet caretakers like "pet stores, licensed breeders, shelters and rescues."

Michael Siavrakas, Owner, New England Herpetoculture LLC, Opposes:

Michael Siavrakas argues that instead of passing a ban on pet stores selling cats, dogs, and rabbits they should focus on stronger enforcement of current regulations. These regulations are listed in his testimony.

Safari Stan's, Opposes: The customers, employees, or management of Safari Stan's Pet Shop listed below testified in opposition to HB 5112. They note the amiable treatment that each pet receives at Safari Stan's Pet Shop, the overall knowledge of the staff, and the fact that each pet purchased by Safari Stan's pet store originates from reputable breeders. Many customers who testified note their positive experience with the store feeling the staff was educated and the pets they purchased were happy and healthy. Ultimately, they argue Safari Stan's Pet Stores offers consumers a valuable choice.

Dennis Hamilton, Customer, Safari Stans Pet Center, Opposes
Victoria Hamilton, General Manager, Safari Stans Pet Center, Opposes
Vante Ballard, Customer, Safari Stans Pet Center, Opposes
Asela Shabazz, Pet Counselor, Safari Stans Pet Center, Opposes
Terry Spears, Customer, Safari Stans Pet Center, Opposes
Sai Prakash, Marketing Analyst, Safari Stans Pet Center, Opposes
Togi Kuttamperoor, Owner, Safari Stans Pet Center, Opposes

Fifty-five members of the public testified against the proposed ban of cats, dogs, and rabbits being sold in pet stores. A large proportion of these individuals argue that pet stores purchase only from responsible breeders, licensed by the USDA, and provide excellent care to the pets at their store. They argue banning the sale of these animals in pet stores only leads to a lack of consumer choice and could even cause more puppy mill activity by replacing highly regulated pet stores with "backyard breeders" and black markets for these sorts of pets. These individuals are also concerned that if this bill passes that many pet stores would lose significant amounts of revenue, in some cases even necessitating store closures and job loss for employees.

Reported by: Derrick Arnold

Date: March 25, 2025