



Testimony in Support of Victoria's Law (SB 44)
October 20, 2020
Senate Judiciary Committee

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and our Pennsylvania members and supporters, please accept this testimony in **SUPPORT of SB 44, VICTORIA'S LAW.**

Victoria's Law is an animal and consumer protection measure that will shift the pet market in Pennsylvania toward more humane sources. It will prohibit the sale of dogs, cats and rabbits in pet stores, effectively cutting off the puppy mill – pet store supply chain.

Victoria's Law will place Pennsylvania on the right side of the puppy mill issue.

Maryland, Maine, California and over 360 localities, including Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Wilkinsburg, Sharpsburg, and Bellevue, have enacted laws that prohibit the sale of puppy mill puppies in pet stores. Several other states considered similar legislation earlier this year, but the COVID-19 pandemic prematurely ended hearings. The New York Senate passed legislation prohibiting puppy sales in pet stores last month by a vote of 47 to 13, but the Assembly ran out of time to take up the bill.

This issue has gained momentum across the nation for good reason. With 31 co-sponsors in the Senate, the issue has also gained traction in Harrisburg. Pennsylvania should join in taking a strong stand *against* puppy mill cruelty and *for* consumers and responsible members of the pet industry.

Victoria's Law is business-friendly.

Prohibiting pet stores from selling puppies is a reasonable restriction and will be minor in its overall impact on business. The vast majority of Pennsylvania pet stores are already in compliance with this legislation. The minority of stores that do sell puppies can change their business model and tap into the [\\$95 billion pet market](#) that is dominated by products and services.

A trade group called the World Pet Association conducted a recent survey that found pet stores who sell live animals make \$246 per square foot, whereas stores that sell only dry goods make \$403 per square foot. A handful of pet stores cling to an outdated business model that is dependent on a broken and inhumane commercial puppy breeding supply chain and less profitable than a pet products and services model.

Plus, the problems puppy-selling pet stores pose for consumers and animals – illness, genetic problems, communicable diseases, deceptive sales tactics, etc. -- more than justify the guardrails in this legislation to ensure consumers and the animals they love are protected.

Victoria's Law would merely require pet stores to adhere to a humane business model, not put them out of business. The puppy-selling pet store model is outdated and socially unacceptable. Of the [top 25 pet store chains](#) in North America, only one sells puppies. The others are thriving by selling products and offering quality services, such as grooming, training and boarding.

Even stores that used to sell puppy mill puppies are thriving on the humane model. Some have added additional services while others focus on the products and services they had previously sold. Some stores started hosting adoption events with shelters and rescues- a decision that saves lives and increases profits. PetSmart claims that consumers who adopt a dog or cat at one of their events spend five times more than the average consumer at their store and often become loyal customers. Many mom and pop shops report that adoption event days are by far their busiest days.

Victoria's Law will protect consumers from a deceptive sales model and sick puppies.

At the HSUS, we receive a constant stream of [complaints from consumers](#) who have spent thousands of dollars in veterinary bills caring for their sick pet store puppies, in some cases only to suffer the heartbreak of their new pet dying. We receive more sick puppy complaints from customers who bought their new best friend from a store than from any other sales outlet.

While tragic, the fact that many pet store puppies are sick is not surprising, as they have the deck stacked against them. Pet store puppies are often born into stressful, unsanitary conditions to mother dogs who were overbred and neglected and taken from their mothers before their immune systems are fully developed. Then, they are crammed into trucks with other sick puppies and forced to endure long transports. In some cases, as [HSUS investigations](#) have revealed, while in the care of the pet store, puppies are denied basic veterinary care and are mistreated.

HSUS undercover investigators have gained employment at 9 puppy selling stores since 2017. At any given time, 10-20% of the puppies have been in an isolation room, often receiving ad hoc care from undertrained staff. In each instance the store owners refused to call in veterinarians until the animal's condition had deteriorated. We found dead puppies and rabbits in store freezers.

When KDKA-TV (Pittsburgh) ran a story on a local puppy selling store last December, they were flooded with responses, including from over a dozen people who had been sold sick puppies at premium prices by this retailer. We hear this store time and time again.

In addition, customers repeatedly report that pet shops claim their puppies come from only the highest quality breeders. Yet, documentation reveals that pet store puppies are primarily sourced from large-scale, commercial breeding facilities with poor animal welfare records. Pennsylvania pet stores are no exception, as [this document](#) reveals.

Pet stores simply do not have the option of sourcing from [responsible, humane breeders](#), because they only sell directly to consumers and would not hand over their puppies to a truck driver to be transported to a pet store, displayed like a product, and sold to anyone with a credit card or financing application.

Victoria's Law will protect against public health risks.

For years, puppy-selling pet stores have addressed the fact that many of the puppies in their stores are sick or likely to be sick by pumping them with antibiotics. This reckless practice recently made headlines when, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately [150 Americans](#), including [several in Pennsylvania](#), contracted an antibiotic-resistant strain of *Campylobacter* from pet store puppies, hospitalizing dozens.

In April 2020, one CDC official wrote to the HSUS: "Recent investigations led by CDC and state health departments indicate that *Campylobacter* is still being transmitted to people through pet store puppies... CDC is concerned that the risk to employees exposed to puppies sold in pet stores is continuing." In January 2018, the same official wrote: "The puppy story is not over – it is difficult to control with a whole system that lacks hygiene at many points and seems to use antibiotics instead."

Victoria's Law will promote responsible breeders and adoption.

Just as there are humane pet stores that stand in contrast to those clinging to a model that relies on the sale of puppies from puppy mills, there are also responsible breeders who stand in stark contrast to puppy mills. This legislation will not impact responsible breeders because they already do not sell to pet stores. Rather, they sell directly to the public so they can meet prospective buyers in person. While the HSUS encourages adoption, we recognize that some will want to buy a puppy from a breeder. That is why we support responsible breeders and work closely with them, especially those in our Breeder Resource

Advisory Council. We also offer resources to the public to ensure they are buying from a [responsible breeder](#) rather than a puppy mill.

The legislation also supports shelters and rescues by encouraging consumers to adopt and allowing pet store to partner with shelters and rescues, rather than allowing them to consider selling puppy mill puppies. It would lessen the burden on shelters that take in pet store dogs. Many pet store dogs end up in shelters because they are often sick and expensive to care for and come with a wide range of behavioral problems—a result of a lack of necessary socialization.

Victoria's Law will close a loophole in Pennsylvania Law.

[Documentation](#) shows that thousands of puppies are being imported from out-of-state commercial breeders to be sold in Pennsylvania pet stores. Those breeders do not adhere to Pennsylvania's Dog Law. In-state breeders selling to pet stores might adhere to the law or they might be flying under the radar. Either way, those breeders are selling their puppies through pet store rather than directly to the public because they do not want the public to see the conditions that they keep their dogs in. This is one of the most, perhaps *the* most, pressing pet welfare issues in Pennsylvania.

It is also crucial to note that stopping the sale of puppies in pet stores will free up precious Dog Law resources that can be redirected to other areas. The Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement dog wardens should be able to focus on in-state issues, rather than mass imports from out-of-state mills.

Please do not hesitate to contact Kristen Tullo, Pennsylvania State Director for the HSUS (ktullo@humansociety.org) or John Goodwin, Senior Director of the Stop Puppy Mills campaign for the HSUS (jgoodwin@humansociety.org) with questions.