

October 15, 2020

The Honorable Lisa Baker  
Pennsylvania State Senate  
Senate Box 203020  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3020  
Room: 362 Main Capitol

Dear Senator Baker, Senator Farnese and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to you as a practicing veterinarian in Pennsylvania and urging you to put Senate Bill 44 ("Victoria's Law") up for a fair vote in the Senate Judiciary Committee. As a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and an ACVS Fellow of Surgical Oncology, as well as the surgeon who cared for Victoria after her rescue from a puppy mill, I have seen first-hand the medical issues associated with breeding solely for profit and the need for "Victoria's Law" to provide protection for animals and families. This legislation would end the financial pipeline and lack of transparency between the breeder and the consumer when an animal is sold through a third party via a pet store sale.

"Victoria's Law" provides common sense change by ending the sale of pet store puppies, kittens, and rabbits across the Commonwealth. Three states (California, Maryland, and Maine) have already passed laws to protect animals and families who are victims of the consumer pet trade. The medical issues in animals bred without concern for genetic issues or even basic medical needs and the impact on the families who purchase those animals is tremendous. It is costly and emotionally draining for an owner to care for many of these conditions, if treatable, and some of the medical issues in the animals can be fatal or possibly contagious to humans. Some of those contagious diseases include but are not limited to campylobacter, brucellosis, ringworm, sarcoptic mange, and intestinal parasites. The laws ending pet store sales of commercially bred animals are effective and it is time for Pennsylvania to catch up!

Victoria was diagnosed late in life with an incurable disease called Degenerative Myelopathy (DM). Genetic screening at a young age would have detected this in her and a reputable breeder would have elected to not have her reproduce. Instead, she was bred at every heat cycle for ten years and potentially passed this debilitating condition on to every puppy she had. She also developed mammary tumors due to remaining intact for so many years and a tumor on her ureter, both conditions requiring surgical repair. Those issues were in addition to a paw deformity and blindness in her left eye due to accidents at the farm that were never medically treated. When puppies are sold at pet stores, their parent's genetic history is not available to consumers. As a result, many families are left with expensive medical conditions to treat often after the "Puppy Lemon Law" period has expired. This leaves them with no financial recourse and medically caring for a pet they have grown to love who could be critically ill.


Medical and behavioral issues in dogs develop due to the substandard, filthy, and neglectful conditions where the puppies are bred. The combination of lack of medical care plus dogs living on wire flooring, kept in their own urine and feces, not getting enough fresh air or exercise and lacking the socialization and kind human touch can have a long-lasting effect on animals. The most crucial time for development in a puppy's life is between three and ten weeks of age. Without proper human and animal interaction, puppies can grow up to be fearful or even show signs of aggression long after they have left the puppy mill. Puppies given vaccines not safely stored or that have expired or administered improperly can make them sick. When they are separated from their mothers and litter mates too early, their immunity and

socialization can be severely impacted. When these dogs make their way to dog dealers and/or pet stores, they change hands multiple times even across state lines and they can contract often fatal diseases like parvovirus or distemper. The pet store consumer might never know the truth of the medical and behavioral history of their puppies, kittens, or rabbits and veterinarians are unable to appropriately trace genetic histories to help quickly diagnose the most complex medical problems.

As veterinarians, we must help these families navigate through difficult choices and it takes a toll on us as professionals. Veterinarians now comprise of the highest number of suicide deaths based on profession in the United States. It is heartbreaking to not be able to save an animal who is beyond repair or see a family make a choice to euthanize because the cost to treat or for ongoing care is too high. Knowing that so many of these tragic situations could simply be avoided if a family could not unknowingly buy a sick puppy, kitten or rabbit from a pet store yet that it continues is beyond frustrating.

I urge you to support SB 44 "Victoria's Law." In doing so, you will demonstrate your commitment to the lives and health of Pennsylvania's animals and the consumers who depend on you for protection through fair legislation. Please let me know if you or your staff would like any additional information regarding the medical issues associated with animals bred in poor living conditions and sold through pet stores, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kendra Hearon". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored, textured background.

Kendra Hearon, VMD  
Diplomate ACVS  
ACVS Fellow, Surgical Oncology