

October 16, 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:

My name is Grace Kelly and I am the President and cofounder of Finding Shelter Animal Rescue, based in Norristown, PA (Montgomery County). We are a 501c3, Pennsylvania registered charity and hold a rescue kennel network license issued by PA Bureau of Dog Law. Since 2010 when we founded our organization, I have personally rescued and transported well over 500 dogs from puppy mills in Pennsylvania. These dogs have made it safely to foster homes in my organization or to other reputable Pennsylvania rescue partners who are also committed to a high level of veterinary care and adoption placement. One of the dogs I was fortunate enough to rescue and personally adopt was my beloved Victoria, the namesake and inspiration for SB44 "Victoria's Law."

On October 22, 2017 Victoria was voluntarily released with a mixed breed dog we named Pippa by the puppy mill operator who had owned and bred both for 10 years. Both dogs were born at the farm and lived their entire lives without names and minimal human interaction. They were covered from nose to tail with fleas and other than a current rabies vaccine (the state required minimum) they had received no other veterinary care but had current Pennsylvania issued dog licenses. We drove the dogs directly from the farm to our veterinarian (as we do after each rescue) due to their poor physical condition. The dogs were terrified, growling and cowering in fear, and their stench was overpowering. With time, love, good care and patience, both dogs became loving, social, and happy indoor pets.

Pippa was surrendered because she was no longer productive, and Victoria was being released due to "having trouble walking" as the puppy mill operator described. When I asked for some background on the dogs, he could tell me little about Pippa despite her living there for ten years but he offered a bit more information about Victoria who he said he "would not be giving up if she was walking better because she was a good breeder." When asked for more detail he confirmed that she had more than 15 puppies in her first litter and nearly as many every litter after that at every heat cycle. That is at least 150 puppies produced in her lifetime. He told us that he even debated giving her up because at her age she could still "throw a lot of pups" (meaning she gave birth to many puppies per litter) and had been such a profitable dog for so many years but she was having trouble standing up so wasn't as interested in breeding the last time he tried.

The conversation with the puppy mill producer who owned Victoria was a difficult one for someone like me who loves, respects, and appreciates animals. His matter of fact tone and ease in discussion of discarding the dogs to replace with new, younger, breeding females was effortless for him but painful for me. Yet it was not an uncommon conversation. I had hundreds like that one before and have since had many more with various puppy mill operators. Victoria is just one of thousands of dogs who suffered a puppy mill life but one of very few who could be rescued. If they are operating legally, the dog's only hope is to be voluntarily surrendered. As I do after most visits to puppy mills, I left in tears and the dogs who were still living there remain on my mind and in my heart to this day. I never have and never will pay for a dog's release from a puppy mill. They are all voluntarily surrendered when the animal is deemed no longer useful or productive.

Victoria had a progressive, neurological disease called Degenerative Myelopathy which is common in some poorly bred lines of German Shepherds. There is no cure, it is genetic, and she passed it along to all her puppies. Some will become symptomatic and eventually paralyzed like Victoria, others may not. But we do not know how many of her puppies became breeders themselves, thus passing along this gene to their offspring. A simple blood test (like we did

after her rescue) would have identified Victoria as having the gene for the disease and a reputable breeder would have chosen to not have her reproduce.

Puppy mills do not care about the genetic integrity of their breeding practices, they simply care about profit. Many puppy mills like the one Victoria came from do not even sell to the public and no information can be found about them, they simply sell to dealers who then distribute to pet stores or as online resellers. Documentation can be falsified, and the buyer of the puppies will never see the parents of their new animal or know what genetic conditions are in the blood line. Some might win the numbers game and wind up with animals who are relatively healthy or social, but many do not. Reputable breeders share full genetic screening results with their buyers and reputable rescues like Finding Shelter do all necessary medical testing and treatment, blood work, vaccines, spay and neuter surgeries and are fully transparent to adopters by sharing full medical records and disclosing any known behaviors.

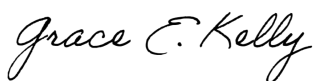
In 2019, Finding Shelter accepted a one-year old chihuahua named Max from an owner who stated that he could no longer keep him. They purchased him at Booth's Corner Pet Supply in Garnet Valley, PA. Within a week of being surrendered to our rescue, Max had to see a specialty surgeon for a painful, genetic, orthopedic condition called luxating patellas. His kneecaps in both hind legs would not stay in place and a new groove had to be surgically created in his bone and the kneecaps resecured. It took two separate surgeries, one for each knee, it cost over \$6,300 (after a very generous discount) and it was more than 12 weeks of recovery time. Wonderful, little Max fully recovered and was adopted, but the financial burden was considerable for our small nonprofit. Think of the buyers of dogs like Max who do not have the ability to pay for surgeries or receive discounted care.

Owners not keeping dogs, cats and rabbits from pet stores and surrendering them to rescues and shelters is common. Many pet owners who deal with medical or behavioral issues themselves wind up with extraordinary medical bills or devastating decisions to have to euthanize sick animals, if they even survive. Some zoonotic diseases can even make the families of those animals sick. This is not acceptable practice and as caring Pennsylvanians we need to do better for each other and the animals in our communities.

Puppy mills and pet store consumer fraud issues have been prevalent in the Commonwealth for decades. The issue is further compounded by pet stores importing puppy mill dogs from other states with less oversight of their kennels and the stress of long-distance transport of the puppies. Decades of problems surrounding this issue are not easily fixed but SB44 "Victoria's Law" easily tackles ending the financial outlet for puppy mills and dealers through pet stores and requiring transparency directly from Pennsylvania breeders.

I have dedicated my entire life and my whole heart to rescuing dogs, mostly from Pennsylvania puppy mills. Every precious life saved, and every family completed because an animal has been placed in a loving home is rewarding. Rescue dogs are not "damaged goods," they are simply unlucky until they find forever happiness. But we cannot continue to stand by as animals are exploited and families are duped by false marketing. At this point we are just going to continue to tread water and keep putting band aids on a problem that is occurring at a much deeper level. I respectfully ask that you consider passing SB44 "Victoria's Law" so that every nameless puppy mill dog out there can have a chance at freedom and the people of Pennsylvania can be protected from heartbreak.

Sincerely,



Grace Kelly
President
Finding Shelter Animal Rescue
www.findingshelter.org