



C/O Scranton Area Community Foundation
615 Jefferson Ave., Suite 102
Scranton, PA 18510

October 16, 2020

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Lisa Baker, Chair Larry Farnese, and Judiciary Committee Members:

On behalf of the NEPA Animal Welfare Collaborative, we would like to thank you for holding a public hearing to discuss Pennsylvania Dog Laws, Animal Welfare, and SB 44, PA's Pet Retail Sales bill, commonly referred to as "Victoria's Law." SB 44, introduced by Senators Tom Killion and Andy Dinniman along with an additional 29 co-sponsors, has bi-partisan support and was named for a German shepherd who was mercilessly overbred for ten years at a Pennsylvania puppy mill and passed along an incurable, genetic disease to an estimated 150+ puppies.

The NEPA Animal Welfare Collaborative represents many constituents in Northeastern PA who see firsthand the devastating fallout from inhumane breeding practices and abuses that occur in large scale breeding facilities – often known as puppy mills, kitten mills, or rabbit mills. Established in 2019, the NEPA Animal Welfare Collaborative is a collective of over forty (40) animal shelters, rescues, advocates, and sanctuaries across Northeastern PA, including Lackawanna, Luzerne, Wayne, and Wyoming Counties. The NEPA Animal Welfare Collaborative aims to set the standard for all animal welfare initiatives in NEPA, working together to utilize available resources to improve both the care and lives of animals. Our mission is to work on initiatives aimed at ensuring animals in Northeastern PA achieve a happy and healthy life—free from abuse and neglect. The Scranton Area Community Foundation serves as the convener of the NEPA Animal Welfare Collaborative, which meets on a quarterly basis.

According to the *Ending Sales from Puppy Mills* brief from The Institute of Public Policy and Economic Development (September 2020), these mills, or inhumane large-scale breeding facilities, contribute a large share of the animals who are sold at retail pet stores. These abusive practices at the mills often include overbreeding, inbreeding, neglect, lack of veterinary care, insufficient water and nutrition, lack of socialization, inadequate protection from the elements, insufficient space, a lack of exercise, and poor sanitation, among others. These animals often spend their entire lives in cages and are subject to abuses that are harmful to their wellbeing, and which can result in health or

behavioral issues that may not be immediately noticeable to the people who purchase them. These unfortunate health and/or behavioral issues that result can be very costly and extremely stressful to deal with, the burden of which often fall on taxpayers and animal welfare organizations.

Victoria's Law is designed to alleviate animal suffering, mitigate the burden on consumers from being duped into supporting these inhumane breeding mills, reduce the burden on taxpayers and local agencies, and drive the pet market towards more humane sources like shelters, rescues and responsible and reputable breeders. Responsible breeders would not be overregulated or overburdened, and consumers would have the choice to purchase pets from breeders who allow them to see the conditions in which they raise their animals, or to consider adopting animals from shelters or rescue organizations.

Legislation prohibiting sales from puppy mills need not necessarily place an economic burden on retail pet stores, as measures can be taken to mitigate financial impact on businesses including shifting of business models to focus more on selling pet supplies and service delivery, optional collaboration with legitimate animal care and rescue organizations to showcase animals for adoption, etc. There are many successful examples of these practices that have been implemented across the country.

It is important to note that similar legislation was signed into law in California in 2017 (AB 485), in Maryland in 2018 (HB 1662), and in Maine in 2020 (LD 1311), with bipartisan support in all three states. Another bill passed the state senate in New York this year, and over 300 cities and municipalities across the U.S. have passed local ordinances as well.

The NEPA Animal Welfare Collaborative believes that SB 44, Victoria's Law, would simultaneously improve animal welfare, reduce the financial burden on taxpayers and local agencies, decrease the problem of pet overpopulation, and the tragedy of thousands of animals being euthanized each year.

We greatly appreciate the Judiciary Committee Members consideration to vote this bill out of committee.

Sincerely,

The NEPA Animal Welfare Collaborative Steering Committee

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