



October 16, 2020

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

Thank you for holding a hearing to discuss Pennsylvania Dog Laws and Related Animal Welfare issues including SB 44, Victoria's Law.

For over 128 years the Erie Humane Society has been a long-standing pillar of Erie County. In 1987, the Erie Humane Society incorporated our animal cruelty division staffed with two Humane Officers that work diligently to safeguard all animals in need. Our organizations mission is to investigate crimes of animal abuse and neglect. Over the last 5 years we have been called to investigate reports about alleged mistreatment and care of pets housed at Heartland Pets.

Furthermore, when we think of animal welfare, historically, we can reflect on a very different time where pet stores such as Heartland Pets were popular and a place to take your family to find a furry companion. However, what has transpired since the late 1970s is an abundance of research and education that identifies consumers purchasing pets for thousands of dollars and those pets being extremely sickly and often times not surviving or living out their life expectancy. This is, often times, caused by inbreeding from cruel puppy mills that do not adequately house or provide the appropriate or legal veterinary care. These puppy mills are a direct supplier to businesses such as Heartland Pets. Because of this, the cycle of inhumane treatment by puppy mills is perpetuated and thousands of animal lives are lost.

As the Executive Director of the Erie Humane Society, I had a brief meeting with the owner of Heartland Pets in 2015 to discuss how Heartland Pets could reconfigure their business practices in a more humane fashion. However, the owner of Heartland Pets was more interested in trying to negotiate purchasing adoptable cats from the Humane Society to then resell in his shop. This was firmly denied, by me, on behalf of my organization. This signified that animals are merely a business transaction and a means to profit which is done easily through him purchasing commercially raised animals.

For years, the Erie Humane Society has advocated for Heartland Pets to think about transitioning their business model to a pet store front only hosting adoption days with non-profit organizations throughout Erie County. This way adoption agencies like the Erie Humane Society can continue to ensure the screening process as well as the health and safety of pets in search of loving permanent homes. We need to shift the way in which people are welcoming a new family member into their home. Let's stop making animal lives a business transaction.

We appreciate Pennsylvania Senator Dan Laughlin (district 49, serving Erie County) for co-sponsoring SB 44 (Victoria's Law). We ask that you please vote this bill out of committee.

Thanks for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole Leone". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nicole Leone  
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