

Puppy Mill Law Signed by Jennifer Barrows

Passage of Legislation an Important Step Toward Improving Animal Welfare

CT Votes for Animals, a nonprofit organization comprised of animal welfare advocates from across the region, including many representatives of Our Companions, scored a significant victory in early July when Governor Rell signed into law SB 499, referred to as the “Puppy Mill Law.” Among other significant provisions, the law makes important additions to the “Pet Lemon Law” for consumers who unwittingly purchase sick animals from pet stores and are later faced with bills for veterinary care. As a result of this new law, pet stores that sell puppies acquired from disreputable “puppy mills” will now be liable for vet costs associated with congenital problems that may become apparent after the time of sale, as well as additional veterinary costs due to illness.

“A lot of people are unaware of the horrific puppy mill industry that supplies animals to pet stores,” remarked Susan Linker, CEO of Our Companions and Vice President of CT Votes for Animals. “These mass-production mills are all too common and their abhorrent animal care and breeding practices more often than not produce unhealthy animals.”

Puppy mills traditionally house dozens – and often hundreds – of breeding animals in very confined and filthy quarters, depriving them of proper nutrition, water, exercise, and opportunities to interact with humans or even relieve themselves outside of their crowded kennels. As a result, these dogs who are forced to breed as frequently as possible, all in the name of profit, often develop serious physical problems that are commonly passed on to their puppies. Until now, consumers had only minimal recourse in such instances.

The new law increases from fifteen to twenty the number of days after purchase that a consumer can seek a refund should the puppy become ill or manifest a congenital problem, or die of any illness that existed at the time of sale. Furthermore, the law increases from \$200 to \$500 the amount of reimbursement that a consumer may seek from the seller if the animal requires veterinary care associated with such congenital or pre-existing condition at the time of sale (the purchaser need not return the animal to receive veterinary reimbursement).

According to Debora Bresch, who is the President of CT Votes for Animals and an attorney in the Government Relations Department of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), the new law should allow a consumer to seek up to \$500 in veterinary expenses for each pre-existing illness or congenital problem. Bresch and the ASPCA have been working closely with CT Votes for Animals throughout the process of this bill’s becoming law.

The law also requires pet shops to openly display (within 10 feet of the animal being shown for sale) a “certificate of origin,” stating who bred the animal and who sold it to the pet shop. It also calls for out-of-state suppliers to be licensed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and any applicable state agency (these vary from state to state).

Further, in an effort to address Connecticut’s significant feline overpopulation problem, the “lemon law” exempts pet stores from having to meet the same requirements for kittens, provided the kittens are spayed or neutered prior to sale. “Although ensuring the welfare of our feline friends will likely require further legislative work, the exemption from the lemon law for sterilized cats will encourage pet shops to spay or neuter cats before adoption,” said Bresch.

Indeed, much work remains to be done to protect companion animals from the perils of mass breeding and distribution, and the ASPCA is working in other states to improve conditions within puppy mills. In particular, Pennsylvania has already improved enforcement of its breeder regulations and will soon require larger breeders to provide dogs

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with more cage space and opportunities for exercise. “In fact, rather than take the necessary steps to comply, Pennsylvania facilities are closing and more licenses are being revoked as a result of bad practices,” said Bresch.

“At the very least, it is hoped that the new law here in Connecticut is effective in improving the health of animals sold in pet stores,” said Susan Linker. “This is not the end of the story – not by a long shot – but it’s a critical step toward our goal of creating real change in the way companion animals are treated in this state.”

Our Companions urges consumers to think twice before acquiring an animal from an unlicensed or unknown breeder or from a pet store, when thousands of unwanted animals are euthanized each year at animal shelters across the nation. We may initially believe we would be saving the life of the animal currently living in a cage at a pet store, but we actually would be supporting an industry that is responsible for the suffering of hundreds of thousands of animals.

To learn more about the Puppy Mills, visit StopPuppyMills.org.