



**Testimony in support of House puppy mill amendment to S. 301**

**Submitted by Joanne Bourbeau, Northeastern Regional Director,  
The Humane Society of the United States**

Good morning Chairman Starr and members of the Senate Agriculture Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the puppy mill amendment added to the Senate's miscellaneous agriculture bill. My name is Joanne Bourbeau. I've lived in Whitingham, VT since 1995 serving as the northeastern regional director for the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). I also serve as a regular instructor of animal cruelty investigations at the Vermont Police Academy and am board chair of the statewide Vermont Disaster Animal Response Team, a non-profit dedicated to providing emergency care to pets displaced by disasters. Last summer our volunteers spent 6 weeks at the Barre Auditorium providing round-the-clock shelter and care for 72 animals displaced by the floods.

I'd like to start my testimony by describing exactly what a puppy mill is, and why it is so important to pass this language now. A puppy mill is an inhumane, commercial dog breeding facility in which the health of the dogs is disregarded in order to maintain a low overhead and maximize profits. In puppy mills, mother dogs spend their entire lives in cramped cages with little to no personal attention. When the mother and father dogs can no longer breed, they are abandoned or killed.

Due to poor sanitation, overbreeding and a lack of preventive veterinary care, the puppies frequently suffer from a variety of health issues, creating heartbreaking challenges for families who should be enjoying the delights of adopting a new family member. Responsible breeders will be happy to meet you in person and show you where the puppy was born and raised—and where their mom lives too. Shockingly, there are an estimated 10,000 active puppy mills in the U.S., with 500,000 dogs kept for breeding purposes, and 2.6 million puppies sold each year.

Public records show that most pet store puppies come from puppy mills. The pet shop language added to S.301 is a commonsense, straightforward animal welfare and consumer protection policy that will prevent the sale of dogs and cats in any *additional* pet stores. It will not change the current pet market in Vermont since the one store that occasionally sells puppies will be able to continue to do so, and most Vermont residents will continue to obtain the pet of their choice from shelters, rescues and responsible breeders who only sell directly to the public—never through pet stores.

Seven states and over 490 localities prohibit the sale of dogs and cats in pet stores. The language in S.301 is modeled after Maine's law that was enacted in 2019 and is working as intended. New York enacted a similar law which goes into effect in December and will stop 50+ pet stores from selling puppies. Massachusetts and New Jersey are seriously considering legislation this year, as those states are also gravely concerned about bad actors from New York moving into *their* markets. Pennsylvania and Michigan have bills pending, and in NH the Senate bill was sent to a study committee for further review this summer.

It is crucial that this prohibition on additional pet stores selling puppies becomes law this year because there is nothing stopping bad actors from moving into Vermont who have track records of animal welfare and consumer protection issues. With New York's law going into effect in December, there is a very real concern that if Vermont doesn't act, a year from now the situation could look very different, with several puppy stores in the state and a slew of heartbroken, financially devastated residents as victims. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture didn't have the resources

to continue to license and inspect our state's animal shelters or rescue groups. How will they find resources to regulate a growing pet shop industry in Vermont? I confirmed with the state veterinarian that pet shops are not only inspected before initial licensure, but also annually at minimum, and for cause if a complaint comes in.

While we hope every store impacted by a humane pet store law will transition to a humane business model—and many do—some will look for new states to call home. We saw this happen after Illinois passed its law, with some bad actors moving to Wisconsin and Indiana, and after California passed its law, with the Vegas area seeing an increase. Two New York puppy stores have already moved to Connecticut. *We don't want New York's problem stores to move here.*

- New York puppy stores import thousands of puppies from Midwest puppy mills that keep dogs in terrible conditions. Here's a summary of just some of the horrible breeding facilities New York puppy stores resell puppies from, based on public records: [Puppy Mill to NY Pipeline - Google Docs](#). I've also shared a 15-year summary of pet buyer complaints that the HSUS has received directly.
- Puppy stores engage in [predatory lending](#), misleading sales tactics, and regularly sell [sick/dying puppies](#) to unsuspecting consumers. Recently, the New York Attorney General cracked down on a pet store for selling sick puppies—the exact thing we are trying to keep out of Vermont: [Attorney General James Wins \\$300,000 for Customers of Long Island Pet Store That Illegally Sold Sick Puppies \(ny.gov\)](#)
- Terrible in-store conditions have been uncovered repeatedly at puppy stores, including a New York pet store, Chelsea Kennel Club, which a judge ordered to pay nearly \$4 million fine, only after an undercover investigation revealed the issues: [Judge orders \\$4M fine for pet store that sold sick puppies \(nypost.com\)](#)

A major factor in New York's passage of their Humane Pet Store Law (and every other state with a law in place) was that the problems posed by puppy stores were too serious and numerous to merely regulate. The system was too broken to fix. And, it was not feasible for the Attorney General, undercover investigators, or anyone else to address this issue one-by-one, store-by-store. The only solution is stopping the sale of puppies in pet stores altogether.

Those suggesting that merely regulating where pet stores source puppies is the solution are ignoring the failed attempts at this in other states. New Jersey has had a sourcing law for years and is now seriously considering legislation to stop the sale of puppies in pet stores altogether. Here's a glimpse into the puppy mill cruelty New Jersey pet stores are importing even with a sourcing law in place: [New Jersey Pet Stores & Puppy Mills](#).

Maryland and Illinois both had sourcing laws on the books when they repealed them and replaced them with a prohibition on the sale of puppies in pet stores. New York City had a strict sourcing law, and the failures of that law were a big factor in the state passing their prohibition. Connecticut's sourcing law is also not working as intended and they will be considering a humane pet store law next year.

The current [puppy lemon law](#) (§ 3921), will remain in place, as it applies to all pet dealers (any person who sells or exchanges or who offers to sell or exchange cats, dogs, or wolf-hybrids, or any combination thereof, from three or more litters of cats, dogs, or wolf-hybrids in any 12-month period), not just pet shops. This law will do nothing to stop puppy stores from moving into Vermont and selling sick puppies to unsuspecting consumers. Most people aren't going to return their puppy to the store that allowed her to get so sick in the first place, and the lemon law caps reimbursement for veterinary fees at the purchase price of the puppy, even though many spend far more caring for sick pet store puppies. In other states, even those with much stricter lemon laws, puppy stores view them as a mere cost of doing business.

Stopping the sale of puppies in additional pet stores will not hinder business. Vermont will remain a welcoming place for the vast majority of pet stores in the nation that already do not sell puppies. [Industry reports](#) show that the pet products and services industry is thriving, with Americans spending \$147 billion on their pets in 2023 and solid growth expected to continue. Of the [Top 25](#) pet store chains in North America only one sells puppies. Those that choose this

inhumane, controversial model are outliers in their own industry and would benefit from transitioning away from the sale of puppies.

Animal welfare issues can be complicated, and this legislature has grappled and continues to grapple with a lot of them, as you know. But this animal welfare issue is actually quite simple to solve. By closing our state to the puppy-mill pipeline now, we are making a strong statement that Vermont will not contribute to this cruelty.

I hope you will vote favorably to keep this important amendment in S. 301.

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

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