

Good Evening,

I understand that the Vermont House Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry Committee will be considering this some form of action on this bill at your meeting tomorrow. I have read the bill, seen comments pro and con, and considered its purpose and proposed methodology. At this point in time, I would like to voice my opposition to this legislation and ask that you consider skipping over this legislation at this time.

Please understand that I'm a dog fan - all dogs regardless of their background or genetics. They are remarkable animals with an unlimited ability to tolerate our human failings and give us their hearts. That being said, there are a couple aspects of this proposed legislation that concern me.

1. There are not that many pet stores in Vermont. This bill seems to seek to force these independent businesses (however many there are) to become sales outlets for animal shelters and rescue organizations. That's an odd requirement - especially considering:

A. There is no requirement for compensation of the pet store for the space they would provide or the costs associated with maintaining and operating that space.

B. The bill seems to require these pet shops to stay in business - even if they don't want to - in order to continue providing this free sales space.

C. There seems to be no requirements related to the shelters/rescue organizations providing:

- Any care for the pets they'd be showing.
- Food/water for the animals they be showing,
- Proof of vaccinations and veterinary clearances for the animals they'd be showing.
- Some type of documentation as to the legitimacy of the shelter/rescue organization.
- Evidence as to whether the shelter/rescue organization is a registered non-profit entity registered with the Vermont Secretary of State or a for-profit business registered with the Vermont Secretary of State and the Vermont Tax Department.

2. I have lived and worked in Vermont for over 40 years and my wife and I have owned dogs almost continuously over this time. After competing in AKC Dog agility competitions for a number of years, I became an AKC Agility judge in 2010 - a part-time hobby/job that has allowed me to travel around the United States meeting dog owners their dogs. Through that travel, I've been able to meet thousands of folks and many thousands of dogs.

As AKC's agility program is open to all dogs - pure-bred or not - I've heard many stories about where folks have found their dogs ranging from traditional breeders to friends to rescue organizations to strays found along the sides of roads. From this, I've concluded that there is no single source from which one needs to obtain a dog.

On the other hand, while there are legitimate shelters and rescue organizations out there, I've also come to see that there are some that are essentially profit centers for the proprietors and these "organizations" are paper thin and of questionable legitimacy. They pop up with a sad story and a truck-load of dogs to "re-home". Some may actually be the "puppy mills" so many of us find so abhorrent.

...and the question that runs through my mind is always: Are these dogs truly recovered by legal means and authorities in their state of origin for legitimate reasons ..... or have they been bred in puppy mills for this specific reason, loaded into that truck and driven to an anonymous location where a well-intentioned local "sponsor" has arranged an "event" where they can be "marketed"?

While I'm not saying that all such events are bogus. There are many legitimate rescue organizations across the country doing good work....but the ones I know that are doing the best work are not mass-marketing their animals in anonymous locations. Rather, they have an identity, a phone number, an address. They are not pop-up points of sale. They work with potential adopters to insure that the matches they are making are in the family and the dog's best interest. They don't want that "adoption" or "sale" to fail but they care enough to want the animal back if the match turns out not to be a good one. How does requiring a business to provide space and support at no cost for an independent vendor to set up shop assure this outcome?

The point is that I have no idea which ones are and which ones are not other than the lack of credentials for some makes me concerned. And that's the source of my other specific discomfort with this Bill. In addition to the burdens and potential liabilities this Bill appears to place on legitimate private businesses in the Vermont, I'd like to see this type of bill have requirements that the shelters/rescue organizations have to establish their credentials, document their identities and the sources of the animals they present and establish that they are providing the needed care and attention the animals in their charge need and deserve and that the organization has the funds to carry out their mission. How would a legitimate pet store owner be able to determine the legitimacy of such an individual/organization when the law requires the to provide such space without pre-condition?

And what of the well-intentioned Vermonters who might buy/donate to obtain their new family member at such an event? The new owners of these animals deserve the consumer protections that accompany all similar "sales" and "charitable donations" (as I have seen some of the fees described). This bill makes no reference to this aspect of the transaction.

In summary, based on my reading of the proposed legislation, I think it's flawed as it's purposes/intentions are unclear, it imposes a burden on any legitimate pet shop owner that they can't refuse or ignore, it appears to offer and air of legitimacy and State sanction to any organization or individual who claims to be a pet shelter, rescue organization or an individual doing such work and the Vermonters who obtain dogs via this source have no assurances of the

legitimacy of the shelter/rescue organization and no recourse in the event of a problem. This is way to vague to trust that these animals are getting the care and attention they need and deserve.

Isn't that at least one of the goals of this legislation?

Please do not pass this Bill forward. Or at least delay such action until the language of the bill is more definitive, you are sure that it's well-reasoned and you feel my concerns have been addressed.

Thank you.

Tom

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