

COIT ANIMAL CLINIC

May 22, 2024

The Honorable Tullio Liberati, Chair
Michigan House Government Operations Committee
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48933

Dear Chair Liberati:

My name is Michael Phelps and I graduated Michigan State University College of Veterinary Medicine 1986. I practice both companion animal and farm animal medicine. My work with pet shops began in 1991 with VI Pets in Grand Rapids. I took on Curious World pet centers in 1992 (four stores) and have worked with David Boelkes at Barking Boutique since they opened in Wyoming MI.

I would say I have as much experience in dealing with medical problems encountered in the retail sale of puppies as most any other veterinarian in the state. I have been involved in everything from design of facility, medical protocol, (diagnosis and treatment) and training of kennel staff in identifying and preventing disease in these puppies. I have always placed emphasis on sanitation and disinfection in preventing the spread of disease not only to other animals but to people as well.

There are individuals and some groups that are opposed to pups being sold in retail facilities. These people are very vocal in their negative portrayal of puppy sales. I know some states have started to outlaw puppy sales recently.

A person with some knowledge of the sale and marketing of pups in Michigan should be aware that the majority of dogs being sold in Michigan are from totally unregulated kennels, with minimal veterinary care and this is where the worst cases of neglect are found. Even worse, there is zero consumer protection for pets sold out of unregulated kennels.

A licensed facility that sells pups in Michigan must only accept puppies accompanied by an interstate health certificate from a licensed and federally accredited veterinarian. The imported pups must be inspected once more before being sold by a Michigan licensed and federally accredited veterinarian. They must be of 8 weeks of age or older and have updated vaccines. All testing and treatment are recorded on this health certificate.

Changes in puppy care over the last decades has improved substantially. The use of improved diagnostic tools, treatments and record keeping have improved the welfare of puppies dramatically. More open play areas for puppies, with environmental enrichment and socialization is now the norm.

Where do we draw the line at prohibiting animal sales? What about other species commonly sold as pets? Should sale of cats, rodents, ferrets, reptiles, pigs, birds and aquatic pets be outlawed as well? I strongly encourage you to protect puppies and consumers and oppose HB 4838.

As a veterinarian I see my role as one who promotes animal welfare, prevents or ends suffering, protects the health of not only the animals in my care but also the people with whom they come in contact.

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Cc: Rep. Laurie Pohutsky, Vice Chair
Rep. Mike McFall
Rep. Bryan Posthumus, Minority Vice Chair
Rep. Jaime Greene