



May 21, 2024

**RE: House Bill 4838**

Dear Members of the Government Operations Committee,

As the advocacy voice of the responsible pet care community, the Pet Advocacy Network represents the interests and expertise of retailers, companion animal suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, pet owners, and others involved in the many aspects of pet care across the United States. Our association promotes animal well-being and responsible pet ownership, fosters environmental stewardship, and ensures healthy pets' availability through our local, state, and federal work. In addition, we routinely advocate for legislative and regulatory proposals to protect the health, safety, and availability of companion animals.

On behalf of the responsible pet care community, **we ask that you vote no on House Bill 4838, legislation that would ban the sale of dogs, cats, and rabbits in licensed and regulated retail pet stores.**

Proposed bans, like this one remove consumer protection provided by pet stores. Retail pet stores are the most licensed, regulated, and inspected place where a family can seek out a pet companion. Consumers have many choices, but retail pet stores are the only ones that are licensed, regulated by the state, and regularly inspected. This bill does nothing to address the problem of substandard breeding practices.

Retail bans often result in inconsistent standards of care and remove existing consumer protections specifically designed to protect against pet seller fraud and abuse. Purebred dogs are popular, but not everyone knows where to find a responsible breeder and a better solution to a wholesale ban is strong, effective negligence and cruelty laws, and effective regulation. In this way, bad actors are held accountable while individuals and families can still choose the right pet for their lifestyle.

All of us in the responsible pet care community are dedicated to ensuring that the proper care of animals is the primary focus of any law or regulation. We believe there is a solution here that protects responsible small businesses while ensuring that animals are only coming from responsible and ethical breeders.

While bills like this are often touted as the only way put an end to “puppy mills”, fewer than four percent of pets purchased come from pet shops, and by removing access to the highly regulated pet stores it not only undermines responsible choice, but it also increases the likelihood that someone ends up contributing to puppy mills by inadvertently purchasing a dog from one.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Michigan Legislature in raising the bar to ensure proper animal sourcing that protects dogs, cats, and rabbits. We have worked with state legislatures across the country who have rejected extreme bans like this one in favor of increasing oversight and regulation. By choosing instead to build on the existing standards in place and working with local pet store owners to improve sourcing and transporting standards, while making sure that families have all the information about any animal readily available to them states have been able to save local small businesses, preserve pet choice and, most importantly, assure the safety and health of all animals in the state.

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Examples of the standards that we have worked to implement in place of wholesale bans are:

- Prohibit sale of puppies and kittens under 8 weeks old.
- Create strong pet shop “sourcing” restriction (The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) licensed breeders that meet specific criteria and small hobby breeders) to protect consumers.
- Implement consumer warranty standards.
- Prohibit roadside sales of puppies.
- Create mandatory puppy microchip to enhance consumer protection.
- Require retailers to provide consumers access to electronic animal care sheets.
- Require shelter record keeping & reporting standards.

These requirements would ensure that when a pet store purchases an animal, they do so only from a responsible breeder, conducting due diligence into the breeder they choose.

Pet stores and the licensed, responsible breeders they work with are a highly regulated, best-in-class source of pets that have been raised under federal and state care standards and are inspected regularly, provided veterinary exams, and keep detailed records of the condition and care of their animals:

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) established and enforces humane care standards under the federal government’s Animal Welfare Act that regulate the transportation, purchase, sale, housing, care, handling, and treatment of animals for use as pets.
- Breeders with five or more breeding females not USDA-licensed, are prohibited from selling to pet stores.
- USDA-licensed breeders are routinely inspected to ensure they follow humane standards for veterinary care, shelter, food, and clean water.
- State laws regarding animal care and warranties also regulate pet stores. They must keep records related to health, veterinary care, and the source of the animals they sell.

We urge the Michigan Legislature to focus on the well-being of all companion animals by evaluating and strengthening the enforcement of existing laws and applying them to more sources, including pet stores, rescues, shelters, and licensed breeders.

While well-intentioned, **retail pet sale bans will not stop bad breeders who are unregulated, unlicensed, and are not held accountable to any animal care standards.**

Beyond the legal requirements, our members feel a responsibility to the animals themselves. They work with families to find the ideal pets for their situations because that is the best way to ensure successful lifelong pet relationships and keep pets from being surrendered to shelters and rescues.

These local businesses are committed to the health, safety, and well-being of the animals they provide for families. They are active in the community and have established strong relationships with Michigan pet



owners, which helps sustain their businesses because they cannot compete with the volume pricing that online or big-box retailers can offer.

The best way to put the bad actors out of business is to evaluate, improve and increase enforcement of existing animal care laws, including setting and enforcing sourcing restrictions and establishing strong and uniform standards of care while applying them to all sources, including pet stores, rescues, shelters, and licensed breeders.

The Michigan Legislature should improve and enforce the existing comprehensive regulations to go after bad breeders who break the law and hold all regulated breeders to the same standards of care.

**We ask that you vote NO on this bill in favor of working together** to find ways to meaningfully address bad actors while protecting animals, consumers, and the local small businesses without limiting pet choice here in Michigan.

We appreciate your consideration and the opportunity to provide comments and input.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Miller-Hurley  
Vice President of Government Affairs

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