

Veterinary Statement in Support of HB 4838

Michigan's Puppy Protection Bill

20 May 2024

I am a veterinarian, speaking of my experience with dogs who come from puppy mills.

These animals are invariably ill with heritable and preventable conditions, and are heavily parasitized. I have come to recognize a puppy mill dog even before the client tells me the provenance of their new pet.

The dogs carry high burdens of intestinal parasites. The indiscriminate use of anti-parasitic agents by mills that use them results in development of drug-resistant parasites. This in turn poses a dangerous risk to other animals and to humans, as many of these parasites are zoonotic. Drug-resistant hookworm infection is a very serious concern now, and is transmissible to people, which children at highest risk.

They are inadequately vaccinated, and fall ill with viral conditions that are completely preventable by adequate vaccination and basic hygiene. Adopters are given shockingly inaccurate information about vaccination, including warnings that a puppy's warranty will be revoked if the purchaser vaccinates the dog.

Eye, heart, dental, immune, respiratory, and musculoskeletal disorders are among the most common issues that we see with these dogs: all of these are heritable conditions, which means that the disease is propagated by continuing to breed the affected dogs. Owners are unaware of these issues, and are often unable to afford the veterinary care that these animals require. Consequently, the health problems are neglected and the dog suffers, or is prematurely destroyed.

The puppies are removed from their mothers prematurely. They suffer severe stress of mass transport and housing change at critical developmental stages. These result in lasting behaviors of insecurity and anxiety.

The adult dogs demonstrate characteristics that I have come to recognize almost as diagnostic of a puppy mill background. They do not know how to eat and drink from bowls. At the mills, the slop of table food waste and cheap dog food is thrown on the ground for them to lick up, together with dirt and parasites. They are forced to drink water drop-wise from hamster-bottles. Their teeth are destroyed from chewing at cage bars in boredom and frustration. They are prematurely arthritic from spending their lives confined to a cage. They carry a defeated demeanor from which they may gradually be released following months of behavioral therapy by the adopter.

Rescue organizations and adopters bring many dogs to me who have been "rescued" from mills. Breeders post online that they are preparing to destroy puppies who have not been adopted by a certain age, and rescuers rush to save them. They let it be known that "worn out"

female dogs (usually just 3 or 4 years old) will be destroyed unless somebody wants them. Breeders have learned to exploit rescue organizations whose resources are much more urgently needed elsewhere than for cleaning up the waste and suffering generated by puppy mills.

A veterinarian heals sick animals. The assault on a veterinarian's mental health in witnessing the suffering caused by puppy mills is immeasurable. The misuse of animals by mills is soul-destroying, all the more so in that it does not have to exist – at least not legally. Please support HB 4838 to stop the sale of animals by puppy mills.

Thank you kindly for your consideration.

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