



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

May 20, 2024

Please reject House Bill 4838 – The pet store ban

Dear Chair Liberati and members of the House Committee on Government Operations:

I am writing on behalf of the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA), an animal welfare organization founded in 1991 to provide evidence-based solutions to complex issues involving animals. NAIA promotes animal health and wellbeing, works to preserve the human-animal bond and the basic civil rights of people who live and work with animals. Our members are pet owners, breed enthusiasts, rescuers and animal businesses and professionals, scientists and veterinarians. Dozens of Michigan kennel clubs and other animal-related organizations are part of NAIA.

We are writing to express our strong opposition to H B 4838 and to ask you to carefully consider the following background facts before voting on it.

Although this bill may be well intentioned, it promotes solutions that are based on outdated situations and biased information.

First, there are far fewer Americans breeding dogs today than just a few decades, fewer families allowing the family pet to have puppies and fewer hobby and commercial breeders. According to national animal welfare organizations, shelter impounds of dogs are down 80% from their peak and in many locales only those dogs who are unadoptable dogs – ones that are too old, too sick or too aggressive to be adopted out – are being euthanized. This signifies a sea change in pet population control.

As an unintended consequence, there are no longer as many dogs entering local shelters and rescues as in the past and not enough locally bred dogs to meet demand. This has resulted in the development of a practice called *humane relocation* – the mass movement of dogs from areas of high supply to areas where shelters and rescuers have room to take in more and the ability to adopt them out.

The importation of dogs through *humane relocation* supply chains is both national and international, and in some northern states accounts for at least half of all the dogs in rescues and shelters.

Although it hasn't yet reached half in Michigan, the number is significant and growing. [The Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) estimates that over one million dogs are imported into the US every year.](#) More than half of all pet dog acquisitions today are from the rescue/shelter sector, which is virtually unregulated.

Today it is the **unregulated** rescue/shelters and large-scale **unregulated** breeders that are routinely charged with and found guilty of animal abuse and cruelty, not pet stores. Pet stores by law can only buy from regulated breeders who are inspected and whose inspection reports are published on the USDA site. If assuring good animal care and treatment is the goal, additional state laws can be passed to require stores only to buy from regulated breeders whose inspection reports show no violations of the type that could hurt an animal.

[Mid-Michigan animal shelter owner faces animal cruelty charges](#)

[78 dogs removed from a North Shores Animal Rescue](#)

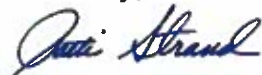
[Delta County bust: Puppy mill horror must be stopped](#)

Ironically, you are being asked to ban regulated pet store sales by groups and individuals who are engaged in unregulated rescue/shelter importation and sales. If this law is passed, Michigan dog purchasers will be forced to swap a regulated source of dogs for the poorest, least regulated source of dogs in the pet marketplace.

Anti-pet store advocates often argue that the demand gap that currently exists can be filled by hobby or casual breeders. This is not true unless hobby or casual breeders greatly increase the number of puppies they breed each year, basically becoming commercial breeders themselves. No, what is far more likely (and already happening) is that rescues and humane societies will fill the gap with imported dogs. Sadly, a fair number of shelter dogs have behavior problems, and some come from no-kill shelters where saving the life of a dog is more important than protecting a child from a dog with a known history of aggression. Few rescue/shelters provide warranties to on the dogs they place.

Instead of banning legal businesses, NAIA supports laws that prevent animal abuse by regulating all marketplace actors, retail and nonprofit. This would make the health and welfare of pets a top priority and have the added benefit of protecting consumers. Banning a pet store - simply swaps a regulated source of dogs of a type that the public wants for a poorly regulated source of dogs from unknown backgrounds. Ultimately, whether or not a dog is purchased from a retail establishment or a nonprofit organization, that pet's health and welfare should matter equally. You can better protect the health and welfare of Michigan pets and consumers through well-targeted and enforced regulations than by banning the legal retail sale of dogs and driving those sales underground. Please contact me if I can offer any additional information.

Sincerely,



Patti Strand, President NAIA