

May 22, 2024

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



Dear Chair Liberati:

My Wife Debbie and I are owners of The Family Puppy, launched in 1998. Throughout the past 26 years we have honed our "Dog Only" three store niche in SE Michigan. Recognizing the need to be certain of the treatment provided at breeders, we continually work to raise the standards of kennel raised puppies and their parents. Providing thousands of Michigan families with happy healthy puppies, we are proud of the many benefits of puppies sold in pet stores.

I am writing to share the considerable progress and contributions we have made in collaboration with dog breeders across Michigan and Indiana to elevate the standards of care in breeding facilities. Our commitment is rooted deeply in ensuring the well-being of both parent dogs and puppies that are sourced for our pet stores.

We started a mission years ago to identify the best breeders we could find within close proximity of our stores. We stepped forward to help these breeders improve their kennel facilities, often bankrolling major changes ourselves. A few include replacing double stack wire kennels with single-level kennel systems and exercise yards that ensure dogs receive the physical activity they need. We also encouraged our breeders to establish routine veterinary care in their kennels. This has provided our breeders with ongoing guidance and oversight from a respected source as well as programs for routine vaccinations, annual physicals and teeth cleanings. More recently we have used the relationship we have developed to encourage the use of new health screening tests so that hereditary diseases can be reduced in their kennels and moreover to our clients. We have also set a voluntary breeding age limit of six years to promote the health of breeding dogs as well as enabling easier rehoming of parent dogs. One of the most heartwarming changes has been the prioritization of socialization of all dogs thereby fostering better behavioral health for the parent dogs as well as the puppies we offer. By taking this positive approach, and even funding the changes in some cases, we are raising the bar for the entire pet industry.

Most breeders that sell to pet stores have much more oversight and accountability than any other source of puppies for Michigan families: **USDA, AKC, MDARD Large Scale Dog Breeding Program passed in March 2017 and Michigan ACT 287, AN ACT to regulate pet shops, animal control shelters, and animal protection shelters; to establish uniform procedures and minimum requirements for adoption of dogs, cats, and ferrets; and to prescribe penalties and civil fines and to provide remedies.**, as well as our own eyes and ears as buyers of our puppies. If a breeder does not meet our criteria, we do not have to purchase from that breeder. Pet stores offer consumer protection with a written warranty and as a business it befits us to greatly minimize health issues for our clients.

It is essential to address that the photographs and narratives circulated by opposition groups often depict conditions that are outdated and no longer reflect the current state of dog breeding facilities. The images commonly shared do not represent the new standards of care that have been widely adopted across the pet community.

Our passion for improving the lives of these animals is unwavering, and our actions speak to a shared goal of enhancing the quality of life for every dog in our care. We remain committed to transparency and continuous improvement, ensuring that the advancements in animal welfare are not only maintained but also advanced in the years to come.

We urge the committee to consider the strides made and to recognize the outdated nature of the opposition's claims. We are open to dialogue and further collaboration to continue enhancing the standards of animal welfare in all sectors, and that all sources of dogs for Michigan residents have parallel goals and requirements, not just pet stores. This bill does nothing to increase the welfare of dogs and will only hinder our ability to continue the forward movement that has been made.

The most recent US Census says there are more than 4 million Michigan's households. According to World Population Review (2024) (\*1), 41.9% of Michigan Households own an average of 1.6 dogs. Let's be conservative, 41% or 1.5 million Michigan households owning 1.6 dogs equates to approximately 2,400,000 dogs in our state. Pet stores are by far the smallest source of pets, only about 4% of dogs are acquired from pet stores nationally. Between our 3 locations, Troy, Novi, and Flint, combined we sell an average of 1000 puppies a year. Pet stores are not the problem!

Furthermore, according to Forbes (2024) (\*2), Millennials make up the largest percentage of current pet owners (33%), followed by Gen X (25%) and baby boomers (24%). The interesting statistic is that Gen Z at 86% is the largest generation of dog owners. A quick reasonable review of these facts demonstrates that there is a continued growing demand for companion dogs in both the nation and Michigan.

Today the largest source of dogs is by far the shelter/rescue market. There are 184 shelters/rescues reporting to MDARD annually. See Michigan Pet Alliance listing and graphs at link and attached (\*3).

**These reports state that animal intakes into shelters are drastically declining:**

- ✓ 2007 - 223,629 total intakes (dogs and cats combined)
- ✓ 2021 - 129,658 total intakes (dogs and cats combined)

**Euthanasia numbers in all Michigan shelters/rescues are also at record lows:**

- ✓ 2021 – 4040 Total dogs euthanized by shelter decision
- ✓ 2021 – 4902 Total dogs euthanized by Owner decision

The worthiest yet most unknown fact is that Michigan, as are most states, is considered a “No-Kill” state. That means that the shelters/rescues are above a 90% “Live Release Rate”. See attached map showing all counties in the state of Michigan with a cumulative live release rate of 94%.

- ✓ 34 of the 184 Michigan shelters/rescues are at 100% Live Release
- ✓ Another 81 are above 97% live release!
  - ❖ *MPA supports the no-kill movement, which seeks to eliminate the killing of healthy and treatable (manageable or rehabilitatable for medical or behavioral conditions) companion animals in our communities. Euthanasia should be reserved to end an animal's irreparable suffering. Suffering includes physical pain that cannot be remediated, as well as psychological suffering in which the animal's quality of life is unacceptable.*

Proponents of MI HB 4838 are desiring that pet stores ONLY sell dogs acquired from shelters in an effort to help place more shelter animals and lower euthanasia rates. Although the numbers Michigan shelters report do not indicate that this is a true need. In essence it would turn pet stores into shelters, with the only difference being we would be required to give free space in our businesses without receiving any of the fees that shelters collect. This is not a reasonable concept in anybody's viewpoint!

**“Sec. 5a. (3) Beginning July 1, 2025, a pet shop shall not sell, adopt, exchange, or transfer, or offer for sale, adoption, exchange, or transfer, a dog, cat, or rabbit. This subsection does not prohibit a pet shop from collaborating with and offering space to an animal control shelter or animal protection shelter to showcase adoptable dogs, cats, or rabbits. The pet shop shall not retain an adoption fee or any other fee for providing space to any dog, cat, or rabbit showcased under this subsection.”**

I am in favor of much of the language in HB 4838, but this language is already in Michigan Act 287, so why are the proponents eager to ban the sale of dogs, cats and rabbits in pet stores?

As I stated earlier pet shops are the most regulated source of dogs to Michigan families. It seems if this law is passed, Michigan dog purchasers will be forced to swap a regulated source for the least regulated source of dogs in the pet space.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we ask that you **reject HB 4838**.

I look forward to your support and to furthering our cause for the betterment of animal care across Michigan.

Sincerely,

John and Debbie Stottele

The Family Puppy, Owners

[www.thefamilypuppy.com](http://www.thefamilypuppy.com)

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

(\*1) <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/pet-ownership-statistics-by-state>

(\*2) <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/pet-insurance/pet-ownership-statistics/>

(\*3) [https://www.michiganpet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021\\_Final\\_Live\\_Release\\_Report.pdf](https://www.michiganpet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021_Final_Live_Release_Report.pdf)



