

H.B. 5916/5917: Bad for animals and consumers

Background

As consumers have learned more about the source of that “puppy in the window,” over 260 localities across the nation, including 3 in Michigan, have prohibited the sale of puppy mill puppies in pet stores. In response, pet stores and their lobbyists are going state-to-state, asking lawmakers to pass preemption bills that prohibit local regulation of pet stores. Earlier this year, Florida and Georgia lawmakers rejected similar preemption bills, as did Tennessee, Illinois and Georgia lawmakers last year.

H.B. 5916/5917 protects animal abusers and their pet store sales outlets

Pet stores would still be able to source from:

- Completely unregulated, unlicensed breeders, including backyard breeders, that have less than 15 breeding females, regardless of their animal welfare histories;
- Puppy mill brokers—middlemen sellers who often transport dogs hundreds of miles in cramped, unsanitary conditions—regardless of their animal welfare histories;
- Breeders with 15 or more breeding female dogs (large-scale breeders) who are USDA-licensed and haven’t received certain violations—a distinction that says little about humane treatment.

These provisions are unenforceable and will do nothing to stop pet stores from sourcing from breeders that keep dogs in condition that the public would find horrifying.

- Enforcement authorities will have absolutely no way of knowing if the unlicensed breeders are actually too small to be licensed or merely large breeders that should be licensed but have avoided all oversight.
- Enforcement authorities will have no way of knowing if USDA-licensed breeders have the violations listed in the law because this information is no longer publicly available from the USDA, and breeders will have a financial incentive to cherry pick reports, only giving pet stores and enforcement agents the clean ones.
- Even if a breeder is USDA-licensed and without the listed violations, this says nothing about the quality of the breeder. USDA standards are shockingly low, allowing dogs to spend their entire lives languishing wire cages only 6 inches larger than themselves, and the USDA admits it does a horrible job of enforcing these dangerously low standards.

H.B. 5917 would strip local governments of their right to protect consumers, and strip the public of their right to address local issues with their elected officials.

By preventing localities from regulating puppy-selling pet stores, local officials would not be able to:

- Protect consumers from deceitful pet stores that claim to only source from small, local, humane breeders when that is far from the truth;
- Protect consumers from paying thousands of dollars in veterinary bills to care for their sick pet store puppies, and the heartbreak of seeing their puppy suffer or even die;
- Protect consumers from pet stores’ predatory lending schemes and gag orders;
- Protect consumers from public health risks, such as the recent *Campylobacter* outbreak that put 23 people in the hospital and was linked to contact with Petland puppies;

- Effectively manage pet overpopulation, even though it is local governments and taxpayers who must fund shelters that house and euthanize homeless animals.

The puppy-selling pet stores and their lobbyists who are pushing these bills are asking legislators to protect an outdated and socially unacceptable business model.

- It is well-documented and indisputable by anyone outside of the puppy mill pipeline that inhumane commercial breeding facilities supply pet stores with puppies.
- Stores that sell commercially raised puppies are an outlier in their own industry as the huge majority of pet stores, including the largest and most successful chains and small mom and pop shops, do not sell puppies.
- Last year, Americans spent \$69 billion on their pets, and every category, including pet food, products, and services, saw an increase *except* live animal sales, which the pet industry predicts will continue to decline.
- Local ordinances that prohibit the sale of dogs in pet stores do not close businesses, but merely require them to change their business model to a more humane one.
- Pet stores are not needed to supply the public with new pets, as only 4% of Americans obtain dogs from pet stores. A far better option for those who choose not to adopt are responsible breeders who care deeply for their dogs and sell directly to the public.

H.B. 5916/5917 is backed pet stores with a history of lawsuits, scandals, unhappy consumers saddled with sick puppies and high vet bills, and public health risks.

- Petland Novi is at the center of a lawsuit brought by 24 complainants alleging they knowingly sell puppies that suffer from genetic defects, infections, and highly contagious and deadly diseases.
- A veterinarian went public after he quit working for The Family Puppy due to puppies coming in with “urine stains, unkept fur and underweight body conditions.” He was also ordered by the store owner to euthanize a puppy with Parvovirus in lieu of treatment.
- In 2013, the Michigan Dept. of Agriculture required The Family Puppy to quarantine a puppy with contagious ear mites after learning that several puppies with ear mites were shipped to the store. The other puppies with ear mites had already been sold to consumers.
- According to former Petland veterinarians and employees, hundreds of Petland consumers, and numerous lawsuits, Petland often sells sick puppies.
- The Centers for Disease Control recently alerted the public to a *Campylobacter* outbreak linked to contact with Petland puppies. 113 people in 17 states were infected and 23 were hospitalized. The strains were anti-biotic resistant, likely due to the fact that pet stores pump sick puppies with antibiotics to appear healthy on the sales floor.
- In 2017, The Barking Boutique received a warning letter from the Michigan Dept. of Agriculture for importing dogs without documentation of proper vaccinations.
- In a 10 year summary of over 5000 puppy buyer complaints received by The Humane Society of the United States, Michigan ranked 6th in number of complaints about puppies purchased from pet stores.