



Bans On Retail Pet Sales Fail To Protect Pets, Undermine Responsible Pet Choice

The American Kennel Club (AKC) loves all dogs and cares deeply about their wellbeing. The AKC is the world's largest breed registry for dogs. Our affiliated clubs operate America's largest purebred rescue network. For more than 135 years, AKC has been proud to be the only non-profit all-breed registry devoted to the health and wellbeing of all dogs.

The AKC advocates for responsible dog owners and supports strong enforcement of local and state animal cruelty laws as well as the federal Animal Welfare Act, which provides consistent minimum standards of care, regulatory oversight and inspections of pet breeders, dealers, and other important players in the pet industry. The majority of breeders who register their dogs with AKC do not sell pets through pet stores; however, AKC's strong commitment to responsible dog ownership and the well-being of all dogs, and our expertise with both rescue and purpose-bred dogs compels us to weigh in on this important issue.

Animal rights groups that oppose the purposeful breeding of dogs have long sought to unfairly tarnish the reputation of responsible breeders and shut down regulated professionals by falsely claiming that breeders are cruel or negligent "puppy mills".

A common tactic of anti-breeder groups is to push for laws that prohibit pet retailers from selling purpose-bred pets by using inaccurate and emotionally-charged claims that pet breeders and pet stores routinely neglect pets. Typically, their "solution" would force retailers to offer only pets from rescues or shelters.

In fact, laws to ban the sale of purpose-bred puppies are not only inefficient, they undermine the responsible dog ownership and the wellbeing of pets. Consider the following:

Retail bans undermine responsible choice.

Bans on the sale of purpose-bred pets create severe and artificial restrictions on the consumer choice and the ability of responsible individuals to obtain the best pet for their lifestyle, whatever source they choose. Responsible choice, which discourages impulse adoptions/purchases and includes consumer education, improves successful long-term placements and addresses a major underlying cause of pets cycling through shelters.

The numbers don't add up.

Only four percent of pets obtained in the U.S. come from retail pet stores. Approximately 44 percent come from rescues, shelters, parking lot rescue events, etc.; with the remainder coming from a variety of other sources¹. Banning an industry that accounts for only four percent of sales would not accomplish the proponents' stated goals. A more efficient approach to improving animal welfare is to enforce reasonable negligence and cruelty laws to which all owners are subject.

Retail bans remove existing consumer protections specifically designed to protect against pet seller fraud and abuse.

Shelters and rescues are not regulated in the same way as breeders, and therefore pet obtained through rescue/shelter sources cannot offer the same consumer guarantees, recourse, or protections. Proposed laws thus repeal protections that come with purpose-bred pets.

Retail bans promote inconsistent standards of care

They create an artificial demand for dogs that are not subject to, and do not benefit from U.S. animal welfare regulations or the health tests and reporting required of professionally bred pets. Ultimately, this harms U.S. pet owners, businesses and policymakers responsible for these decisions.

Bans on U.S. breeders and pet sellers incentivize troublesome unregulated foreign puppy production.

Consumer demand for puppies in the U.S. is approximately 8 million annually, based solely on the replacement rate of currently-owned dogs. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that approximately 1 million dogs are imported into the U.S. annually². The CDC has further noted that many of these dogs are being imported with invalid health certificates. A large portion of these dogs from unregulated sources are destined for distribution in retail/rescue channels.

Retail bans on purpose-bred puppies create a loophole that allows for deceptive sourcing practices and incentivize production of pets overseas in unregulated conditions. This feeds the artificially- supported market for the pets from “rescue” or unknown/ unregulated sources – even as quality U.S. breeders are being pushed out of the marketplace.

Retail bans push buyers to online pet sellers and scams.

Purebred dogs are popular because they offer specific, predictable characteristics that enable future owners to understand the needs and requirements of a pet throughout its lifetime and to make a responsible choice in selecting a pet. If purebred pet buyers cannot obtain the pet of their choice from local sources, this will push them to the internet, where they will not be able to meet the pet before purchasing it, and potentially to unscrupulous pet sellers and scammers.

A better solution.

A better solution is strong, effective negligence and cruelty laws, effective regulation of commercial pet breeders and sellers, and consumer protection laws that hold pet sellers accountable. In this way, bad actors are held accountable while individuals and families can still have the opportunity to choosing the right pet for their lifestyle.



[1] APPA National Pet Owners Survey, 2016.

[2] CDC, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/01/31/2019-00506/guidance-regarding-agency-interpretation-of-rabies-free-as-it-relates-to-theimportation-of-dogs>.