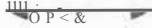
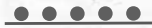


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TESTIMONY OF THE PET INDUSTRY JOINT ADVISORY COUNCIL BEFORE THE FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA CITY COMMISSION REGARDING A PROPOSED ORDINANCE REGARDING THE RETAIL SALE OF DOGS AND CATS IN FORT LAUDERDALE  
May 2, 2017

The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) appreciates the opportunity to offer the Fort Lauderdale City Commission our views regarding the proposed ordinance to "prohibit the retail sale of dogs and cats" in Fort Lauderdale. As the county's largest pet trade association, representing the interests of all segments of the pet industry throughout the United States, PIJAC counts among its members national associations, organizations, corporations and individuals involved in the commercial pet trade. More specifically, PIJAC represents the interests of responsible pet stores, distributors, pet supply manufacturers, breeders, retailers and pet owners throughout Florida and across the United States.

Let me begin by saying that no one cares more about healthy and safe pets than do PIJAC and our members. We have for many years provided a well-respected animal care certification program that is widely utilized by persons in the commercial pet trade as well as in shelters and humane societies across the country. Our association has long been recognized as the voice for a responsible pet trade, and we routinely advocate legislative and regulatory proposals establishing governmental mandates where appropriate to advance the public interest and the welfare of pets. PIJAC works closely with USDA to ensure effective enforcement of the federal Animal Welfare Act, and has since its inception. We regularly work with federal and state agencies as well as local governments to advance animal welfare interests.

Even as we have worked to raise standards of care, PIJAC has battled misconceptions about the quality of pet store animals and the sources of such animals. The unsubstantiated assertion that pet store animals generally come from substandard breeding facilities is commonly used as a smoke screen to obscure the fact that the overwhelming majority of pet owners who choose to purchase from pet stores bring home a happy, healthy pet and remain highly satisfied with their pet store experience.

The reality is that almost all pet store puppies originate from USDA licensed breeders who are regularly inspected and found to comply with appropriate care standards. By contrast, many of the dogs and cats from other sources, including rogue Internet operators, private sales, shelters and rescues, did not come from licensed breeders.

What purpose does this proposed ban serve? It doesn't protect consumers, as there are currently no stores who sell dogs and cats within the town limits. That being said, it should be noted that customers already enjoy far more protection in the law for the animals they get from pet stores than from any other source. They would merely be deprived or looking to a pet store as one of several alternatives for acquiring a pet, and in the process lose statutory protections that they currently enjoy. It doesn't protect the animals themselves. As already noted, pet store puppies are as healthy as any others and typically receive more frequent veterinary care than puppies from other sources. Additionally, consumers who buy their animals from pet stores enjoy extra protections in the event the animal purchased is sick or diseased. As well-intentioned as this proposal may be, the approach the ordinance takes is unsupported by all available facts.

Further, a retail pet sales ban indiscriminately targets responsible pet stores, while exempting others who need not even comply with the standards under which pet stores already operate. Thus, in considering a town wide retail pet sale ban, the Commission risks enacting a law that will not only fail to stop the bad actors who operate substandard breeding operations, but will actually exacerbate the very problem a retail sales prohibition seeks to address. Banning the sale of dogs and cats by pet stores that are subject to strict regulation and sourcing transparency will only drive prospective pet owners to unscrupulous sellers of pets who are not licensed and are unconcerned about compliance with animal care standards.

Animals delivered to pet stores in Florida are highly regulated:

- In the state of their birth
- In the state of their distributor
- By the federal government
- By Florida when the animals enter the state
- And animal cruelty is a criminal offense everywhere

Some make the claim that prohibiting the sale of commercially bred dogs and cats in pet stores will lead to more adoptions of shelter animals. No independently developed data supports this claim. PIJAC knows that animal control facilities and non-profits are often excellent sources for pets for some prospective pet owners, though not for everyone. Many shelter animals are relinquished because of socialization or health issues. Adoption may not be an appropriate option for families looking for a certain breed of animal for health considerations. There are varied reasons why families choose the animals they do. They should have a choice and not be denied the pet that best fits their family's requirements.

Furthermore, Florida has strict pet warranty laws. People who purchase pets from pet stores in the state have ample opportunity to recover under alternative remedies if they purchase an unfit animal from a pet store. In obviating this consumer protection provided under state law, the proposal adversely impacts potential small businesses and pet owners alike within Fort Lauderdale. Only pet stores provide this warranty - shelters and rescue groups do not offer a warranty.

We would also call your attention to the comments made by the Chicago Veterinary Medical Association in opposition to a similar ordinance that passed in 2014 in Chicago: "The Chicago Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) strongly believes that ongoing education is a much more effective method to increase pet owner awareness and bring about the desired positive change necessary to address valid concerns regarding unethical, unscrupulous breeders who are the ultimate problem." Their statement cites the several more stringent protections offered to consumers who buy from pet stores as a primary reason for their opposition.

Hyperbole and emotionalism are poor substitutes for rational evaluation of objective information in establishing public policy. PIJAC recognizes that a few substandard facilities supplying pet stores do exist, as do substandard breeders providing dogs directly to the public and, in fact, substandard shelters as well. And, our efforts to ensure humane standards of care are met in all of these facilities will continue. However, singling out pet stores for specious generalizations based on anecdotal evidence will NOT eliminate the existence of substandard conditions. While this may be a "feel good" approach it only diverts attention away from efforts to really accomplish effective solutions and we urge the Commission not to move forward with any proposed ordinance that targets pet stores in this way.

PIJAC is highly sympathetic to the concerns motivating this proposed ordinance, but an outright ban on retail pet sales is unjustified, harmful to the future of the local economy and ultimately will fail to better protect pets. We respectfully urge the Commission to reject the ban and not impose excessive restrictions

on all pet owners by preemptively prohibiting legitimate local businesses that would be committed to the health, safety and well-being of the animals they could provide to Fort Lauderdale families.

If the purpose of this proposal is to encourage tighter restrictions on the sources of animals coming into jurisdictions that DO have existing pet stores, PIJAC would welcome the opportunity to work with the Commission to raise the bar to ensure proper animal sourcing that protects dogs and cats. For instance, common sense solutions would require:

- Animals come from only USDA licensed sources
- Breeders sourcing animals in any future Fort Lauderdale pet stores shall not have an entry on their last USDA inspection report that directly impacts animal health (these records are searchable online) - these inspection reports could travel with the animal and be made available to the customer

We would welcome the opportunity to work with Fort Lauderdale to arrive at a meaningful solution to the public policy concerns related to the care of animals. By working together, we can make sure that Fort Lauderdale's citizens continue to have access to healthy animals to love as pets now and in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Respectfully submitted,

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