



**House Finance Committee
- Proponent Testimony
May 24, 2016**

Chairman and committee members, thank you for providing me this opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Joe Watson and I am the President and CEO of Petland, located in Ohio's first capital, Chillicothe, Ohio. I am testifying in support of this legislation.

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For nearly 50-years Ohio-based Petland has proudly matched the right pet with the right customer.

Petland is America's family pet store. While large pet store chains focus on supplies, at Petland we focus on the human-animal bond. At Petland, a child can experience the joy and responsibility of having their first pet. At Petland a senior citizen can find a new best friend who can provide much needed companionship. Petland is and always has been much more than just a pet store.

There are more than 140 Petland stores located in 8 countries around the world. Here in Ohio, we have 17 Petland stores with 7 locally owned and operated by Ohio Petland franchisees.

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People are passionate about their pets. And so are we. At Petland, the health and welfare of all our pets is our number one priority. Everyone on both sides of this issue are passionate about their pets. But the question today is where Ohioans will obtain their next pet.

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A recent Animal Policy Group study estimates there are approximately 88.5M dogs in America. With an average lifespan of 11-years, that equates to a 9% mortality rate, or replacement rate of demand. In other words, American's will obtain 7.9M dogs annually. This doesn't account for new households desiring to add a dog to their family.

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Where will these near 8M dogs annually come from? ASPCA Pet Statistics states 3.9M dogs enter U.S. shelters annually. Even if 100% of all shelter dogs were adopted out, the U.S. demand would still be short 4.1M dogs, annually.

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For many Ohio families, pet stores are a part of the solution. Pet stores provide families with pets from regulated and inspected kennels. Pet stores offer families protection under state consumer protection laws. Banning pet stores removes all these while not providing any evidence that a "puppy mill" is shut down.

Last week Arizona Governor Douglas Ducey signed into law the country's first state level pet store buying standard. Gov. Ducey stated in a signed letter, "Shutting down the good guys will do nothing to store the bad actors. Rather, it will open the doors for more puppy sales through unregulated sources, where abuse and inhumane conditions are more likely. This bill ensures that

puppies being sold in pet shops are coming from responsible breeders, and includes strict penalties for store owners who do not comply.”

Of the estimated 10,000 breeders in the U.S. only 18% are regulated and inspected by the USDA. That means 8,200 breeders are unregulated not inspected by the USDA. Federal law requires professional breeders who wish to sell to pet stores to be licensed and inspected by the USDA.

Yet, cities have passed bans against pets that come from these 1,800 USDA licensed and inspected kennels.

Banning the sale of regulated and inspected kennels in favor of unregulated breeding operations defies common sense. Yet activists believe that is the answer to improving animal welfare.

Most critics of regulated breeders have likely never bred an animal nor have they visited a USDA licensed kennel. Likewise, it's been my experience that most critics of pet stores have never operated a pet store and lack first-hand knowledge of the care we provide.

As I have traveled the country, I have heard local elected officials commenting that the state or federal government should be addressing these pet store buying issues.

In fact, most recently in Grove City we listened as city officials echoing those same sentiments.

At a February 1, 2016 Grove City Council Meeting, Mayor Ike Stage stated: **It's a state problem** and Florida has the same issue.

Councilwoman Laura Lanese stated: **Mr. Mayor, I would take it even higher and say it's more of a federal issue....ideally they would have taken care of it, they haven't. So meanwhile, while we are waiting for them to take care of it....**

Instead of waiting for the federal or the state to act, I don't know if the state will revisit it, they spent 7 1/2 years on this and this is what we've got. But in the meantime I think locally and I think that's why the frustration comes from all of these localities throughout the country and I think we are going to start to see a tsunami of it, especially in the states where they have legislation that is much weaker.

Councilman Ted Berry stated: **This is a federal and state issue and we are caught in the middle of it.**

Other communities like Grove City feel they are “...**caught in the middle of it.**”

This is truly a state issue. When passed, this legislation will place Ohio among the nation's leaders in pet store buying standards. It will also provide every Ohio family with the same protection when purchasing a puppy at any pet store, regardless of its Ohio location. It will create predictability for

breeders and pet stores but most importantly, the passage of this bill will create the highest pet store buying standards in the country. The passage of this bill promotes animal welfare.

As Arizona Governor Ducey stated, the bill “actually strengthens penalties for pet store owners who do not take measures to ensure that the animals under their care are from a licensed, safe, sanitary and humane place.”

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This legislation is good for pets and it's good for Ohioans. We encourage you to vote in favor of it.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joe Watson
President & CEO
Petland Inc.