



Testimony

of

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before the

New York City Council Committee on Health

On the

Proposed Regulation of Pet Shops

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New York City

Good morning, Chairman Johnson and members of the Health Committee. My name is Daniel Kass, and I am the Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Environmental Health at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. I am joined here today by Mario Merlino, the Department's Assistant Commissioner overseeing veterinary health. On behalf of Commissioner Bassett, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Since I last testified on these bills in April, the Administration has been working closely with the Council to revise the legislation; we want to thank the Council and its staff for a productive process.

To set the legislation into context, I want to quickly review the Health Department's role with respect to animals. The Department oversees the animal sheltering system - administered by its contractor, Animal Care and Control of New York City - which provides field rescue services and accepts, cares for, and temporarily shelters abandoned or unwanted animals. The Department issues dog licenses and also administers the Animal Population Fund spay-neuter programs, which fund spay and neuter services for dogs and cats owned by low-income New Yorkers. We receive and respond to reports of animal bites, coordinate rabies testing and rabies prophylaxis when needed, and investigate animal nuisance complaints. The Department monitors both wildlife and domestic animals for diseases, such as rabies, that can impact human health, and issues permits for the exhibition of wild and exotic animals. Our regulatory work also includes permitting and inspecting animal handling establishments for compliance with sanitary standards and basic caregiving. These establishments include: other non-profit animal shelters (besides AC&C); boarding, grooming, and training facilities; and pet shops that sell animals other than cats and dogs.

Four bills are under consideration today. Collectively, these bills aim to help reduce the population of stray, abandoned and homeless animals, and establish a standard of care for dogs and cats in pet shops. We appreciate your effort to promote safe and humane conditions for dogs and cats. The Administration supports these goals, and we are here today to offer brief comments, answer any questions, and extend our offer to continue working with the Council on these important issues.

Intro 55

Intro 55 seeks to prohibit the sale of animals bred in "puppy or kitten mills," by prohibiting pet shops from selling dogs and cats acquired from certain sources, and to establish a standard of care for dogs and cats in pet stores. The Administration supports Intro 55's effort to influence the acquisition, care and sale of dogs and cats, notably by discouraging their over-breeding. The requirements imposed on pet shops are significant.

Expanding the Department's responsibilities to include permitting and inspecting establishments that sell dogs and cats, including extensive audits of store records and evaluation of compliance with detailed standards of care, would require funding to hire additional staff with veterinary health expertise and more inspectors. We would develop new protocols for on-site inspections, and for review of pet shop documents. The Department would need to modify its online permitting system to accommodate this new permit class, and to adapt its inspectional software. We would also work to engage and educate pet shops about these new requirements, and how to comply.

We do not yet know how many dogs and cats are purchased through pet shops. We also do not know how many fewer dogs and cats would be sold if it became more difficult or expensive to acquire them through pet shops. We hope that, overall, the expanded regulation of pet shops will encourage New Yorkers to adopt from the open admission animal shelters run by Animal Care and Control.

Intro 136

Intro 136 would require pet shops to sell dog licenses and report information to the Department about all dogs sold. The Department supports efforts to expand dog licensure. Dog licensing is a key part of responsible pet ownership. Licensing is required by New York State law, and is required in order to use one of the City's dog parks.

As part of its comprehensive efforts to facilitate dog licensing, the Department has just launched a new online licensing system that enables third parties, including pet shops, to maintain license inventories and to issue the licenses at the time and place of sale. This system also offers a free lost dog finder tool to help lost dogs reunite with their owners. Anyone can enter a New York City license number on our webpage, and the owner will be emailed and called with the contact information of the person who has found the dog. I am proud to report that the system was recently awarded the Best New Application award by Center for Digital Government.

The Department fully endorses the law's licensing mandate, and we believe pet shops can readily comply with the requirement. License fees help support the City's animal care efforts, and provide funding for free spay and neuter services for low and fixed income New Yorkers' dogs and cats.

Intro 146

Intro 146 would require pet shops to microchip and register a dog or cat before releasing the animal. This mandate would be consistent with the requirement that the Health Department has at our animal shelters; Animal Care and Control microchips dogs and cats before they are adopted or returned to their owners. The Department supports this legislation, and believes it will help owners find their lost pets, and reduce the population of lost animals in the shelter system.

Intro 73

Intro 73 would amend the definition of pet shop in the Animal Abuse Registry Act, making the definition consistent with the other bills under consideration today. The Department supports this amendment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.