



Policy Concept

Prevent Animal Cruelty, Protect Biodiversity,
and Promote Resilient Shelters Through
Expanded Retail Pet Sales Bans



Proposal

More than 400 cities and eight states have banned the sale of dogs and cats in pet stores in an effort to shut down puppy and kitten mills. However, most animals sold in pet stores aren't puppies or kittens – they're small mammals (such as guinea pigs and hamsters), reptiles, amphibians, birds, and fishes. Expanded retail pet sales bans prohibit the retail sale of all or some of these species.

Why Are Expanded Retail Pet Sales Bans Necessary?

Preventing Animal Cruelty

Virtually all animals sold in pet stores come from mills where hundreds or thousands of animals are confined to small cages, tubs, and tanks without adequate food, water, or veterinary care. Sick and injured animals may be ignored or gassed or frozen to death.¹

Federal inspectors of major animal suppliers have documented decomposing animals among living animals, cannibalization, cages encrusted with feces, grime, and old food, animals exhibiting abnormal stereotypic behavior, animals unable to access water, severely injured and ill animals with hair loss, scabbing, skin conditions, diarrhea, and eye abnormalities.²

Lack of Legal Protections for Animals Sold in Pet Stores

The federal government does not regulate reptile, amphibian, mice, rat, or fish mills, and birds were only recently included in regulations. However, even small mammal mills regulated by the Animal Welfare Act have long track records of poor animal care. Facilities with prolific histories of neglect and abuse are rarely shut down. Instead, they receive warnings, negligible fines, or no consequences at all.³

Impact on Shelters and Rescues

The mass sale of wild animals like turtles and birds, as

well as "pocket pets" like guinea pigs, increases the number of animals in shelters. Wild animals are often mis-marketed as low-maintenance or "beginner pets" appropriate for children.⁴ Shelters across the country are being inundated with "pocket pets" and struggling to keep up.⁵ The majority of these animals are purchased at pet stores.⁶

Protecting Biodiversity

Many reptiles, amphibians, birds, and fishes sold in pet stores are not native to the locations they're being sold, or even the US.⁷ When these animals escape or are abandoned, some die while others outcompete native animals for resources. Wild animals formerly kept as "pets" are a major cause of the spread of non-native species and have resulted in the establishment of several hundred invasive animal species.⁸ Globally, non-native species are responsible for \$1.4 trillion in damage and control expenses and cost the United States an estimated \$120 billion annually.^{9,10}

Precedent

- In 2017, Cambridge, Massachusetts adopted a retail pet sales ban prohibiting pet stores from selling mammals, arachnids, birds, amphibians, or reptiles unless the animal comes from an animal shelter or rescue.¹¹

- Washington DC passed an ordinance similar to Cambridge in 2022.¹²
- An additional twelve cities have banned the retail sale of species other than cats, dogs, and rabbits such as Boston and New York City (banning the retail sale of guinea pigs) and Ferndale, Michigan (banning the sale of birds, ferrets, frogs, reptiles, rabbits, or rodents).



References

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- 5 Brianna Grant. [Small animals come with big obstacles for shelters](#). HumanePro; Victoria Manna. [City Council bans sale of guinea pigs in NYC as part of new legislation](#). April 11, 2023. Spectrum News NY1.
- 6 2023-2024 American Pet Products Association National Pet Owners Survey; American Veterinary Medical Association. American Veterinary Medical Association's Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook, 2017-2018 Edition.
- 7 Red-eared sliders, an aquatic turtle sold at PetSmart and Petco nationally, are emblematic of this problem. Though native to some areas of the US, red-eared sliders crowd out native turtles, create algal blooms that harm plants and invertebrates, and endanger public health by spreading salmonella.
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- 11 Katheleen Conti. [Cambridge bans retail sales of commercially bred pets](#). The Boston Globe, August 8, 2017.
- 12 District of Columbia Municipal Regulations ([25-J DCMR 300 et seq.](#)).

Liz Cabrera Holtz
 Senior Campaigns Manager
 World Animal Protection
lizcabreraholtz@worldanimalprotection.us