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## Edwin Sayres commentary: Should Ohio cities have the authority to ban or restrict sales of puppies? No



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Puppy mill. Two words that evoke images of horrible living conditions and provoke strong emotions.

Unfortunately, local lawmakers have been misled to equate the term with licensed, inspected breeders—rather than the illegal, substandard operations it rightly describes.

They've been told local bans on pet-store sales would eliminate these bad actors. Despite these good intentions, these bans are not the solution. They are an emotional overreaction to a complex problem that creates a patchwork of inconsistent regulations.

The local pet-sale-ban movement has targeted communities across the country that have no pet stores. Of the 120 bans that have passed, 70 are in communities with no pet stores. If there are already no puppies being sold, how can a ban help to close a puppy mill? It can't, but it does create the illusion that pet-sale bans are gaining momentum.

I have spent the past 41 years working for the welfare of animals. As the president of ASPCA, I pushed for local retail pet-sale bans, but ultimately found this approach had no measurable impact on the protection of puppies. As officials from the Humane Society of the United States have stated publicly, we simply "cannot point to exact puppy mills that have shut down" due to pet sale bans.

There is no evidence that local pet-sale bans are a strategy that will help us eliminate puppy mills. There is ample evidence, however, that local bans expand the unregulated market for puppy mill operators because they eliminate the one source for acquiring a dog that is regulated by federal, state and local jurisdictions and provides consumers with warranty protection.

But there is an alternative: an encompassing state law, requiring all pet store puppies originate from USDA-licensed breeders who are regularly inspected and comply with appropriate care standards. This approach ensures all breeders and pet stores in various municipalities are uniformly operating according to one standard.

Without this, unscrupulous actors will simply skirt local bans and move operations to cities or unincorporated areas of the state to avoid local regulation. This sensible framework has already been adopted by other states, including New Jersey, Virginia and Connecticut.

In recent years, state legislation to improve breeder standards has resulted in the closure of over 1,000 puppy mills. Local pet-store sale bans have closed none. By implementing reasoned regulations and protecting the freedom of choice, we can take an important step toward the elimination of puppy mills.

The process of choosing a new family member is not one-size-fits-all. Some families require a certain breed due to temperament or allergies. Shelters have a limited selection and, often times, due to dog importation, the temperament of adult dogs is an unknown factor.

The single most effective way to ensure a lifelong bond and to prevent a pet being surrendered is to allow prospective pet owners to research and choose how they find their ideal pet. To serve the best interests of both pets and people, we need standards that provide for the safety of animals, give consumers the choices and protections they deserve and support the continued existence of regulated, responsible businesses

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