

Should Shelter Dogs Be Sold In Pet Shops? **Consider the Fallout**

The city of Los Angeles has outlawed the sale of pets in the city's pet shops. The City opposes commercial breeders, the source of most pets for sale in the shops. Even though those commercial breeders are inspected by USDA, the City is of the opinion that the puppies, kittens and bunnies are not properly raised or adequately socialized. Granted based on the law of averages, some of those animals will not be healthy. However if a pet shop consistently receives sickly animals from a breeder/broker the shop owner will find another source for his inventory.

There has been some talk in Los Angeles about allowing pregnant impounded dogs to whelp their litters so the shelters will have a good supply of puppies available for placement. Hmm... I somehow doubt that the accommodations for shelter newborns would be any different from the conditions provided by the commercial breeders. In fact I seriously doubt many shelters could pass USDA kennel requirements for dogs and specifically those for mothers and newborns.

Now the City is suggesting that the pet shops be allowed to "stock" animals from the city's crowded shelters in an effort to reduce the euthanasia rates and get more pets into loving homes.

HAVE THEY LOST THEIR MINDS?

I see disaster and liability issues all over this plan. If shop owners have any idea what most shelter dogs are like, they will say "Thanks, but no thanks".

Before anyone concludes that I am anti-rescue dogs, let me introduce myself. My name is Dana Johnson and I manage a Doberman Pinscher re-homing facility (commonly referred to as a Rescue) from my 10 acre property in Northern California. The majority of dogs here originated in California shelters and were there as unclaimed strays or Owner Turn-ins. The owner relinquished dogs are often there because the owners moved but most are dumped because of aggression or other unacceptable behavior like escaping or barking. Other pets are given up because they need expensive medical care the owners cannot afford.

One of my first concerns with this plan is that while cutsie puppies and kittens sell quickly from a store because they are young and innocent, the available adult dogs from shelters are not going to have that appealing, "I wanna be your best friend" look. No doubt the shelters will pass along some puppies and kittens but for the most part the majority of dogs sheltered are young adult to middle aged dogs with unknown history. Often simple actions will set off undesirable and sometimes dangerous behavior. Some are nervous around children, some don't trust people wearing hats, and others are afraid of men with beards.

A perfect example of hidden trigger points is a pleasant Doberman female I placed with a retired couple who had owned Dobermans before. All went well other than sometimes in the evening the dog would stare at the husband snarling and growling. I of course requested they return the dog but they decided to figure it out. Turns out the husband occasionally had a cocktail before dinner and that brought on the dog's behavior. Since she was never hand shy or acted as if she had been directly abused, we could only guess that she had witnessed domestic violence in a prior home. This trigger was not known because no one here drinks.

Here are just some of the real concerns with this plan:

1. Who chooses which dogs go to the shops – the shelters or the shop owners?
2. The appealing dogs in shelters will be placed as always from the shelter. The dogs in danger of being put down are the ones with age, health, or behavioral issues. It is unlikely that they will fare any better in a pet shop than they did in a shelter.
3. Is the City Council aware that probably 75% of the LA City shelter animals are pit bulls or Chihuahuas? Not every potential dog owner wants a pit or Chihuahua type of dog.
4. Do pet shops have employees savvy enough to manage adults dogs with issues?
5. What happens to the dog if it languishes in the shop for weeks or months?
6. Who's insurance will pay out if an adult dog reacts inappropriately because of stress?
7. What sort of monetary plan is there? Do the shops "buy" from the shelter and then add sufficient amounts to cover their anticipated expenses of food, grooming, extra employees to manage the necessary training and exercise needed to make the adult dogs "saleable"??
8. What happens to the dog if the buyer returns it? Is the shop stuck with a dog that ate the couch or will the dog go back to the shelter?

Adult dogs from shelters should be the last choice for Pet Shops

Shelter puppies and/or kittens, maybe yes, but adults – no way..... Adult dogs are not good candidates for the impulse buying “how much is the doggie in the window” public. Life in a busy pet shop, would be too stressful for most adult shelter dogs. Many shelter dogs are labeled “rescue only” because their kennel stress is such that they won’t show well on the public access “adoption floor”. They certainly would not show well in a busy store. Few pet shop employees will have the skills necessary to work with a shelter dog’s mental baggage.

Anyone looking to acquire an adult dog will be wanting something that has some manners. Few dogs in the shelter system walk well on a leash, know what “sit” means, or are housetrained. Buyers are not looking to take on a labor intensive project. If they are considering an adult dog they want it ready to go so to speak. It is a pretty safe bet that the shelters aren’t going to obedience train the dogs prior to placing in pet shops. By the same token, the pet shops aren’t likely to be interested in dogs that will require a minimum of 4 to 6 weeks of training before they possibly will be appealing to potential buyers.

Have the designers of this disastrous plan given any thought to the liability issues involved? Puppies and kittens from commercial breeders are blank slates and are unlikely to react aggressively to poking fingers and squealing children running about the store. If adult dogs with unknown history are placed in a busy environment they will most likely react in one of two ways – retreat and shut down because of the stress, or lash out and possibly bite in self defense or fear. I’ll bet the Pet Shop insurance carriers are gonna be thrilled with this liability risk.

Something else that isn’t clear to me is who’s dogs are they – really... Are they still going to be the property of the city shelter system and the pet shop will be their “agent”? Will the shelter take the dogs back if the shop owner deems the dog unsalable? How long do they think it will take to find buyers for these dogs? If the dogs fail in the pet shop environment and return to the shelter, they likely will be euthanized. Nothing will have been gained other than subjecting a dog to more stress.

Oh, and who will be responsible for the spay/neuter expenses? After 4 months of age all dogs in CA are required to have a Rabies vaccination. Will the shelters spay/neuter the animals and vaccinate against rabies before they turn the dogs over to the pet shop to sell? The shelters certainly shouldn’t release the dogs intact and without Rabies vaccinations. To do otherwise would be a violation of current CA law. I wonder how they plan to recoup those expenses?

Perhaps the powers-that-be have anticipated the above noted concerns and have a plan in mind, but there is one very important player in this whole scenario that we haven’t heard from:

THE DOG

There seems to be no consideration for the emotional damage that will be done to a dog that was abandoned, abused or neglected in its original home, and who perhaps lived out of dumpsters for a while, and then was slammed into a kennel in a building with hundreds of other confused dogs, and ultimately be shifted to a pet shop’s busy environment. Some can never recover from these experiences or if they do, it is after weeks and months of care, training, and confidence building.

But, hey, it seems that in Los Angeles and other cities contemplating similar action, the dog is simply collateral and a product to be sold with no consideration for what is in the best interest of the dog. I guess... who cares.... it’s out of the shelter and that was the intent, correct?..... who cares if all this has totally destroyed the dog’s emotional stability..... it’s not in the shelter any more and they are all high-fiving each other for emptying the shelters..... until it returns as a runaway, a biter, or not suitable for family life. Euthanasia is not always the worst prognosis.