



## **SUPPORT House Bill #3650 Animal Shelter Reporting Rep. Kay Khan**

**Problem:** Thousands of stray and feral dogs and cats are being imported into Massachusetts by not for profit animal shelters. Animals are coming from Puerto Rico, various other Caribbean Islands and foreign countries. Many of these animals come with tropical diseases including ehrlichia, babesia, resistant strains of giardia, mange, fungus and other diseases. In 2004 one shelter imported a feral puppy from Puerto Rico that tested positive for rabies! Although pet stores are highly regulated, there is currently no regulation of 501(C) 3 private humane shelters that operate as de facto pet stores. Most veterinarians in Massachusetts are not trained to deal with tropical diseases. The situation creates a public health issue.

**History:** The number of animals entering shelters has dropped dramatically over the last 20 years, especially in the Northeast, with a corresponding drop in the need for animal sheltering services. About 15 years ago North Shore Animal League began bringing truckloads of strays from southern shelters to sell/adopt in New York. Massachusetts shelters began to import dogs as well and have expanded on the concept to include import programs that bring thousands of feral dogs and cats from the Caribbean and the southern US. Strays are marketed while shelters promote misleading campaigns that claim widespread “pet overpopulation” in the state. Private shelters have become the leading distributors of pets in the state and remained free of regulation.

A PETA member appears to have inspired an operation to catch some of the many feral strays in Puerto Rico, especially puppies and pregnant females. These animals along with feral kittens have been shipped by the thousands to shelters in Massachusetts where they are easily sold/adopted since few local dogs, especially puppies, are available in shelters. Many of these dogs are infected with tropical diseases in spite of being given health certificates by vets before being shipped. The Puerto Rican strays have come with ehrlichia and babesia, giardia, various skin diseases and even rabies. Shelters turn these dogs over so quickly they cannot really assess their health situation. Over 14,000 feral dogs from Puerto Rico have been shipped to US mainland shelters.

Some Massachusetts shelters also receive as many as 40 puppies and kittens every week from southern states. These dogs have also helped to spread more ehrlichia and whipworms, which were previously uncommon in the Northeast. Even Greyhounds have been imported from Ireland for sale/adoption.

**What the Bill Does:** Importation of dogs and cats to be sold/adopted in shelters from outside of the mainland US will be banned. Shelters that import dogs and cats from US mainland shelters outside Massachusetts will have to keep records of where animals come from and where they go. This information will be sent to the Commissioner of Public Health.

**Why You Should Support This Bill:** The public seeking pets, especially families with children, should be protected from emerging zoonotic diseases carried by stray and feral animals of unknown origin. Breeders and owners of resident domesticated pets should also be protected from the spread of emerging tropical diseases.

### ***For More Information:***

Massachusetts Federation of Dog Clubs and Responsible Dog Owners  
Charlotte McGowan, Legislative Liaison; [cmcgowan2@comcast.net](mailto:cmcgowan2@comcast.net); 617-527-3450  
Holly Stump, Board Member; [Hollystump@Hickoryhillkennel.com](mailto:Hollystump@Hickoryhillkennel.com); 978-356-1644