

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

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December 14, 2022
Start: 10:16 a.m.
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HELD AT: Council Chambers-City Hall

B E F O R E: Lynn C. Schulman,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joann Ariola
Charles Barron
Oswald Feliz
Crystal Hudson
Mercedes Narcisse
Majorie Velàzquez
Kalman Yeger
Deputy Speaker Ayala

A P P E A R A N C E S

Alexandra Silver
Director of the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare

Risa Weinstock
Director of the Animal Care Centers of New York
City

Corinne Schiff
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Deputy
Commissioner for Environmental Health

Allie Taylor
Voters for Animal Rights

Libby Post
New York State Animal Protection Federation

Elizabeth Cabrera Holtz
World Animal Protection US

Maisy Sylvan
ASPCA

Lyle Cleary
Center for Avian and Exotic Medicine

Brian Hackett
Animal Legal Defense Fund

Alexandrea LaFata
Vegan Muse

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Meagan Licari
Puppy Kitty New York City

Brian Shapiro
Humane Society

Cindy Stutts
Bunnies and Beyond

Herve Breuil
Woodstock Farm Sanctuary

Steven Gruber
Mayor's Alliance for New York City's Animals

Elinor Molbegott
Humane Society of New York

Dr. Ellen Crane
Safe Haven Farm Sanctuary

Elisa Trinidad
In favor of passing Intro. 4

Elena Natale
Member of the leadership team at Voters for
Animal Rights

Joyce Friedman
Board of Directors of VFAR

Margaret Lee
Animal Advocate resident of New York City

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Jessica Hollander
Brooklyn resident, business owner and a volunteer
with Voters for Animal Rights

Cindy Nunez Del Arco
Support Voters for Animal Rights

Kathy Nizzari
Founder and Chair of the Lights Out Coalition

Mike Bober
President of the Pet Advocacy Network

Nathan Semmel
Member of the Leadership Team at Voters for
Animal Rights

Gwen Kaiser
Reenies Rabbit Rescue

Angela Connell
Puppy Kitty New York City

Vivian Barna
All About Rabbits Rescue

Suriya Khan
Refoundry

Natasha Reznik
In Support of Intro. 4

Pilar Amaya
Wildlife Rehabilitator

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Nina Bregenzer

In Support of Intro. 4

Dominic Ocochela

In Support of Intro. 4

Schavara Syrabia

In support of Intro. 4

Jennifer Shannon

In support of Intro. 4

Sedotta Bernkrant

Executive Director of NYCLASS

1 COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Mic check for hearing on
3 Health. Today's date is December 14, 2022, recorded
4 by Walter Lewis, location in the Chambers.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: So, once again, good morning
6 and welcome to the Committee on Health. At this
7 time, we ask if you can please put phones on vibrate
8 or silent mode. Thank you Chair. We are ready to
9 begin.

10 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Good morning everyone. I
11 am Council Member Lynn Schulman, Chair of the New
12 York Council Committee on Health. I want to
13 recognize that we've been joined by Council Member
14 Barron and I want to thank all of you for joining us
15 at today's important hearing on Intro. Number 4
16 introduced by Deputy Speaker Ayala, and of which, I
17 am a Coprime Sponsor.

18 This bill would prohibit the sale of guinea pigs
19 as pets and clarify the definition of the term pet
20 shop to address its inconsistent use in the
21 Administrative Code.

22 I also want to thank Alexandra Silver, Director
23 of the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare, Risa
24 Weinstock Director of the Animal Care Centers of New
25 York City and Corinne Schiff the Department of Health

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2 and Mental Hygiene's Deputy Commissioner for
3 Environmental Health for being here to testify and
4 answer questions, as well as the organizations and
5 individuals who have been working tirelessly to
6 ensure that this bill gets passed.

7 As we all know, the city shelters experienced a
8 surge of abandoned and surrendered guinea pigs after
9 the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. During lockdown,
10 New Yorkers for various reasons including social
11 isolation and entertainment for children who were
12 stuck inside cleared the city's pet stores of animals
13 like gerbil's, lizards and guinea pigs. But this has
14 led to an unacceptable result. Around 600 guinea
15 pigs have been surrendered to city animal shelters so
16 far in 2022 compared to only 281 surrendered during
17 the same period in 2019.

18 In October, a box with 22 guinea pigs of all
19 ages, five of which were pregnant was abandoned in
20 the lobby of an apartment in Staten Island. Guinea
21 pigs have also been released by owners in places like
22 city parks, which is not only illegal but also
23 detrimental to the animal survival. Making things
24 even more difficult is the fact that there are a very
25 limited number of veterinarians in New York City

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2 known to have the skills to spay and neuter guinea
3 pigs, many of which live up ten years. It is vital
4 that potential owners are provided with the
5 information and tools necessary to properly care for
6 these animals. All and all, we cannot allow this
7 crisis to continue and the city must take action.
8 Our ACC's and shelter staff are suffering as they try
9 desperately to accommodate this massive influx. That
10 is why Intro. Number 4 is so critical and I am proud
11 to be Chairing this hearing today.

12 I have always been an advocate for animal friends
13 in New York City and the best way to address the
14 guinea pig crisis is to ban their sale from New York
15 City pet stores and encourage adoption and fostering
16 from shelters.

17 With that being said, if you are interested in
18 adopting or fostering a guinea pig, you can do so
19 through the animal care centers of New York City. I
20 want to conclude by thanking the Committee Staff for
21 their work on this hearing Sara Sucher, Legislative
22 Counsel and Mahnoor Butt, Policy Analyst as well as
23 my team Chief of Staff Jonathan Boucher, My
24 Legislative Director McAleer, and my Communications
25 Director Javier Figaroa.

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Deputy Speaker Ayala who introduced Intro. Number 4 is on her way, so as soon as she comes, we'll stop and have her speak on behalf of the bill. I will now turn it over to Committee Counsel to administer the oath.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. We will now hear testimony from members of the Administration. Will you please raise your right hand? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth before this Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions? You may begin when ready. As a note, as the Chair said, when Deputy Speaker Ayala arrives, we will be pausing just to let her make her statement and then you'll resume but you may begin.

ALEXANDRA SILVER: Thank you. Good morning Chairperson Schulman and Council Member Barron. My name Alexandra Silver and I am Director of the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare. I am grateful that the City Council is taking up this legislation concerning guinea pigs and appreciate the opportunity to testify in its favor. I am joined by Risa Weinstock, President and CEO of Animal Care Centers of New York City, ACC. Who will also offer testimony

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2 and Corinne Schiff, Deputy Commissioner for the
3 Division of Environmental Health at the Department of
4 Health and Mental Hygiene.

5 As laid out in the City Charter, the Mayor's
6 Office of Animal Welfare has the power to advise and
7 assist the Mayor in the coordination and cooperation
8 among agencies under the jurisdiction of the Mayor
9 that are involved in animal welfare administration,
10 regulation, management or programs. A wide variety
11 of issues fall under this purview, including but not
12 limited to, those surrounding wildlife management,
13 exotic animals and animal abuse, as well as animal
14 shelters, animal population control and pet shops.

15 In New York City, several agencies including the
16 Health Department, Parks Department, and NYPD are
17 responsible for animal related issues, many
18 additional agencies for example, the Department of
19 Social Services and NYCHA come across animal issues
20 during their operations. This office is positioned
21 to both raise awareness among other offices and
22 agencies regarding animal welfare issues and
23 resources and work with them to improve animal
24 welfare protocols. Another important function of the
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2 office is to serve as liaison for the city regarding
3 animal welfare needs and concerns.

4 One such concern is the large number of guinea
5 pigs being brought to ACC, which is contracted by the
6 Health Department to operate the city's animal
7 shelter system. As Ms. Weinstock can speak to more
8 directly, the increase in guinea pigs in recent years
9 has been an added strain on the organization, which
10 is charged with a daunting task.

11 ACC is the only open-admissions animal sheltering
12 organization in the city. It accepts all animals
13 regardless of medical condition, behavior or age. A
14 variety of species come to ACC from a variety of
15 sources. Some are stray animals with unknown
16 histories, while many are surrendered by owners who
17 can no longer care for them. Animals may be brought
18 to ACC by members of the public, NYPD officers and
19 Parks employees, as well as by ACC's own rescue
20 specialists.

21 The Administration appreciates the hard work and
22 dedication of ACC staff. Running the open-admissions
23 animal shelter system in a city of nearly nine
24 million people is challenging enough, without the
25 added burden of operating during a pandemic. As ACC

1
2 strives to end animal homelessness in New York City,
3 it's important we recognize the role the broader
4 community plays in such a mission. ACC did not
5 create the high number of guinea pigs coming into its
6 shelters and cannot be expected to solve the issue on
7 its own.

8 Intro. 4 is a common-sense effort to address a
9 concrete problem. While it would ban the sale of
10 guinea pigs in pet shops, it would not prohibit New
11 Yorkers from keeping guinea pigs as pets, and guinea
12 pigs could still be adopted through a humane society,
13 animal shelter, or animal rescue group. ACC
14 currently adopts out guinea pigs, as well as rabbits,
15 cats, and dogs. ACC and other animal welfare
16 organizations frequently host adoption events across
17 the city in partnership with pet stores and other
18 venues.

19 Would you like me to pause? I'm sorry, I see we
20 were joined by the Deputy Speaker. Okay, thank you.
21 Guinea pigs can make wonderful companion animals, but
22 like any pets, they come with responsibilities and
23 the decision to bring one home should not be taken
24 lightly. One benefits of adopting a companion animal
25 from ACC is the counseling that comes along with it,

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2 and the connection with the organization in case any
3 questions or concerns about animal care come up down
4 the line.

5 While promoting adoption is essential, animal-
6 sheltering across the country over the past several
7 years has focused more and more on preventing animals
8 from coming into shelters in the first place and not
9 just on rehoming efforts. Helping people keep their
10 pets is a prime goal of ACC and other leaders in
11 animal sheltering. The bottom line is that it's not
12 enough to focus only on increasing adoptions or
13 finding alternative placements with rescue groups.
14 We must also address root causes.

15 The Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare appreciates
16 the City Council's acting on this issue and seeking a
17 solution that both protects the wellbeing of guinea
18 pigs and could help alleviate difficult conditions in
19 animal shelters. Thank you again for the opportunity
20 to address this proposed legislation. We are looking
21 forward to discussing the details of the bill further
22 with you. I will now turn it over to my colleague,
23 Risa Weinstock of ACC, to deliver her testimony.

24 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Before, before you start
25 Ms. Weinstock, we're going to pause right here and

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2 I'd like to turn the mic over to my colleague, Deputy
3 Speaker Ayala for a statement on Intro. Number 4.

4 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Not necessarily a
5 statement but I wanted to say hello, well good
6 morning to all of you and thank you for coming to -
7 attending today's hearing on this very special matter
8 and I really wanted to thank Ali and the Animal
9 Rights Groups and ACC. I know that you know this has
10 been very difficult and it's been long overdue. When
11 I initially heard about this crisis, uhm, I honestly
12 didn't understand the scale. I thought it was like,
13 hey, you know it seems like a practical bill. We
14 should do it but I didn't really understand the
15 magnitude of this situation. And while I would
16 never, it would have never occurred to me to get a
17 guinea pig as a comfort animal during the pandemic, a
18 lot of people did and that's a great thing right. We
19 all have - I have my little - I actually brought a
20 little show and tell because I have my little Charlie
21 with me. Yes, I did, look. He's the first little
22 doggie in the chamber. I know say hi guys. Say hi,
23 my first hearing.

24 He wants to make a statement but we heard so many
25 stories from gardeners that were you know they

1
2 shared, that people were taking the guinea pigs and
3 throwing them you know over the gates because they
4 could no longer care for them and I get it right. My
5 mom passed away this year and I was you know looking
6 for a comfort animal you know myself. I have three
7 cats. I'm a cat mom but I felt like I needed a
8 little Charlie to walk with me and to really keep me
9 sane. But Charlie is a pain in the butt. He gets up
10 at three or four o'clock in the morning like a
11 regular baby right? He wants to be fed, he wants to
12 use - it's a big responsibility and unfortunately
13 right, we have work responsibilities, we have
14 children and now with the holidays coming up, I
15 really want to caution families, right to think it
16 through. Adopt, adopt, we have so many animals in
17 the shelter system already. Charlie is an adopted
18 puppy in Puerto Rico. He's called a Sato dog. He's
19 actually legally blind but he's the cutest, sweetest
20 little baby and you know and we want to make sure
21 that he's okay, just like we want to make sure that
22 all of these guinea pigs that are overrunning the
23 animal you know care centers are taken care of.

24 So, thank you Chair Schulman and Speaker Adams
25 for - you want to see. Charlie's become, he's

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2 everybody's comfort animal and I brought him with me
3 today because I have to take him to the office
4 because he's the office comfort animal too. But they
5 do things for us right? Animals are precious and we
6 love them and we want to take care of them but they
7 require a lot of care and attention and that is why
8 this bill is so important. It isn't about preventing
9 an individual's right to own a pet or to own a guinea
10 pig and if that's your pet of choice, then enjoy them
11 and love them. But right now, we're at a point where
12 we have so many of them and they reproduce so quickly
13 and you know we need to do something, and so I'm
14 happy to finally be hearing this and thank you again
15 for being here. He smells me as his mama.

16 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. So, now we're
17 going to - I don't know how you're going to follow
18 that but we're going to go to Ms. Weinstock. That is
19 a tough act to follow.

20 RISA WEINSTOCK: But thank you for having a prop
21 for us. Good morning Chairperson Schulman and Deputy
22 Speaker Ayala. My name is Risa Weinstock, I'm the
23 President and CEO of Animal Care Centers of New York
24 City. Thank you for this opportunity to testify at
25 today's hearing concerning proposed law to amend the

1
2 administrative code of New York City with regard to
3 pet shops. I would like to address the bill's main
4 provision prohibiting the sale of guinea pigs.

5 But before I address the particulars, just give
6 me a few moments to give you a brief overview of ACC.
7 We were established in 1995 and incorporated in New
8 York State as a 501c3 not-for-profit organization.
9 We are dedicated to rescuing, caring for and finding
10 loving homes for New York City's homeless and
11 abandoned animals and we've been doing this for over
12 25 years.

13 Our mission is to end animal homelessness in New
14 York City. ACC is unique among all other welfare or
15 animal welfare organizations in New York City and
16 that we're the only organization that accepts every
17 animal brought to it. Whether the animal has been
18 abandoned, surrendered, found as a stray, brought in
19 by the public, brought in by NYPD, the Parks
20 Department or our own animal rescue team. And
21 regardless of age, health, status, breed, species or
22 condition, we accept all animals.

23 As the only open admission, animal sheltering
24 organization in New York City, our annual intake
25 exceeds that of any limited admission facility or

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2 other shelter in all five boroughs. So far this
3 year, ACC has taken in over 16,000 animals, including
4 more than 14,000 dogs and cats and in this same time
5 period, we've received over 750 guinea pigs.

6 In 2021, ACC, together with nearly 250 new hope
7 partners and an act of animal welfare community, we
8 achieved a placement rate of 91 percent for these
9 companion animals. Prior to the start of the
10 pandemic, ACC on average took in about 300 guinea
11 pigs each year. However, over the past 30 months,
12 guinea pig intake has almost doubled. This growth
13 has strained ACC in terms of the staff and resources
14 needed to care and find placement for these animals.
15 In an already overcrowded sheltering system, Intro
16 004 provides a pragmatic solution to the
17 proliferation of stray and surrendered guinea pigs at
18 ACC.

19 Intake data has revealed the majority of guinea
20 pigs coming into ACC starting in May 2021, were
21 between the ages of six and nine months, indicating
22 that they had been acquired by their owners between
23 July and August of 2020. Many shelters did not have
24 a generous supply of available pets for adoption
25 after the big adoption foster frenzy in the spring of

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2 2020. However, the public was still seeking on
3 animal companionship and likely found that pet stores
4 were the best option.

5 Throughout the pandemic, many sought the comfort
6 and companionship of a pet. Having a family pet can
7 be a wonderful experience. However, many people
8 mistake guinea pigs as starter pets. When ACC
9 counsels adopters on the care and needs of any pet,
10 we always make sure they understand the commitment
11 involved, regardless of the pet size. Just because
12 a guinea pig is small doesn't mean it doesn't require
13 extensive care. In particular, guinea pigs need an
14 endless supply of food. They are known as grazed
15 animals. Including fresh vegetables and hay.

16 Guinea pigs require much more space to lead a
17 physically and mentally healthy life than most people
18 think. Guinea pigs are also considered exotic in the
19 veterinary world and New York City only has a handful
20 of veterinarians who work with them. In fact,
21 spaying or neutering a guinea pig is concerned very
22 costly and complicated surgery. In our experience,
23 the guinea pig sold in pet stores are not sterilized.
24 Determining the sex of a guinea pig is also very
25 difficult, which leads to males and females being

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2 sold together. This has resulted in surprise litters
3 to unexpecting consumers. Moreover, since the
4 majority of guinea pigs come into ACC unaltered, we
5 incur costs associated with sending them out to
6 specialized veterinary centers for this surgery
7 before we place them with partners or members of the
8 public.

9 ACC welcomes the effort to City Council to help
10 control the overpopulation of pets in city shelters,
11 including guinea pigs. As the third largest species
12 being surrendered and abandoned in New York City,
13 it's imperative to take action to stop the source of
14 guinea pigs into the city shelters. Thank you for
15 your time and your consideration and I'm happy to
16 answer any questions.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you very much.
18 Uhm, so you know what? I'm going to take the
19 privilege as Chair since Diana was personal in her
20 experience. So, I had a dog who passed away a few
21 years ago. His name was Elvis and he; I will say my
22 late partner and I got him at a pet store but nobody
23 wanted him because he had a crooked tail. So, we
24 were the only ones that wanted him and at ten years
25 of age, he went, we had him trained as a safety dog

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2 and as he went to uhm, he went to hospitals and
3 actually met with patients and all of that. So, he
4 was able to learn at ten years and I, right now, I
5 don't have the time to take care of another dog but
6 I'm going to get a rescue dog and I would love to do.
7 I was even looking into fostering and things like
8 that because the animals are so much in need and he
9 was amazing. He lived; he was a West Highland
10 Terrier. He lived to about uhm, 15, which is old for
11 terrier, a little bit old for the terrier.

12 So, anyway, I just wanted to share that because I
13 just, I remember him all the time and he was, he was
14 amazing. He was a therapy dog; I was looking for the
15 word. And so, and he was just for joy. We would go
16 every weekend to a hospital and he would meet with
17 patients and it was amazing.

18 So anyway, with that said, uhm, after - so I'm
19 going to ask for the - after the pet shops laws went
20 into effect in 2015, have you tracked a drop in dog,
21 cat or rabbit surrenders, abandonment?

22 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Nationally intake is going
23 down. Since that bill, we saw a leveling off of
24 rabbit intake but what's happening now is our intake
25 is starting to creep back up.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Really?

ALEXANDRA SILVER: Yes, on dogs and cats.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Uhm, would Intro. 4 have a similar effect on guinea pig surrenders abandonment in terms of you know going down, because I know initially it went down right?

ALEXANDRA SILVER: Absolutely, absolutely and we think that it would level off. What we're seeing now is just a steady increase on intake of surrendered guinea pigs.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Abandoning animals is illegal. Have there been any investigations to identify who is responsible for abandoning large numbers of guinea pigs in buildings and parks?

RISA WEINSTOCK: Guinea pigs are at times found in parks and buildings and I think we can safely say they were abandoned there as opposed to lost. If there are clues, NYPD will investigate but my understanding is that's rarely the case. I know of one case this year where NYPD got involved after being alerted by ACC. They followed a lead but weren't able to identify the source.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So, I have a question. Does the NYPD follow-up on these cases? I mean, are

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2 they really taking this seriously in terms of animal
3 abandonment?

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RISA WEINSTOCK: If they're alerted to, I spoke
5 with the Animal Cruelty Investigation Squad. If
6 they're alerted to a case and there's a lead, you
7 know camera footage, some kind of clue they can
8 follow-up, they will do that.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Let us know if there is an
10 issue there in terms of follow-up. I know they have;
11 they have a unit right that follows up on animal
12 abuse and things like that?

13

RISA WEINSTOCK: There's a dedicated Animal
14 Cruelty Investigation Squad, which is in the
15 Detectives Bureau.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

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RISA WEINSTOCK: And then, my understanding is
18 precincts also will do their own investigations but
19 there's the dedicated-

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: But keep us posted because
21 uhm, we want to make sure that the administration
22 follows up and does what it's supposed to do here,
23 alright?

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RISA WEINSTOCK: Agree.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Has the city done any education or outreach to inform the public of the laws around animal abandonment? That's one question and the other question I have is, since I've learned more about guinea pigs in the last couple weeks than I've ever known or want to know. By the way, there's only I think one or two vets, if I'm not mistaking that do the spaying.

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Uhm, in addition to that, is there an education process just in general, not so much - I know there is when people come in to ACC and all of that but is there an education process of what it means to take in a pet and the responsibilities of everything else?

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ALEXANDRA SILVER: I'll start with the education and then I'll hand it over to Risa for the counseling.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

RISA WEINSTOCK: Uhm, in terms of informing the public, you know park rangers will share information about not leaving pets in parks. And then I know ACC has a resource flyer that doesn't explicitly mention abandonment but anyone who needs support carrying for their pets can contact them and the flyer includes a link to a form and a phone number for those who need

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2 to surrender their pets. But in terms of getting the
3 message out, we'd be happy to work with Council
4 Members to raise awareness among constituents about
5 this issue.

6 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah, I think that's
7 important.

8 RISA WEINSTOCK: Yup.

9 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Then with respect to
10 surrenders or people who have guinea pigs and don't
11 know what to do with them, we have a whole admissions
12 process, if you want to surrender, you call and you
13 make an appointment. You'll talk to a counselor.
14 And so, the idea is that ACC is presenting itself as
15 a resource to the community so that we can hopefully
16 defer abandonment or just get past abandonment,
17 people know that they can come to us. We're going to
18 do what's best for the animal in the end and through
19 that process, you get a lot of information about how
20 to safely and humanely, if you can't take care of
21 your pet, what we can do for you to help you continue
22 or for us to take the pet in.

23 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah, before I ask my next
24 question, I want to acknowledge that we've been

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1
2 joined by Council Member Narcisse. Uhm, oh, and I'm
3 sorry, I didn't see you and Velàzquez.

4 What I'm asking is, is there a way that we can
5 inform even through social media, which doesn't
6 require paid advertising of what it means especially
7 the holiday season, what it means not to abandon a
8 pet but what it means to take one in. Like what the
9 responsibilities are?

10 ALEXANDRA SILVER: That's always part of our
11 messaging. Certainly, if people are interested and
12 they're going to come to the shelter or go online and
13 start asking questions, it's always an application
14 process. And we make sure that it is an interactive
15 process. We want people to keep their pets for a
16 lifetime pet and that's our goal. We don't want any
17 homeless animals in New York City. So, it's part of,
18 once you step your foot into the adoption or foster
19 process, that conversation begins immediately about
20 what it takes to care for an animal.

21 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, no, thank you. The
22 pet shop laws regulate the source of dogs and cats
23 sold in pet shops but not guinea pigs. Do we have
24 good information about where commercially sourced
25 guinea pigs come from?

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2 ALEXANDRA SILVER: We don't have that
3 information. We don't have that.

4 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What role if any does New
5 York City Parks or other agencies it may come into
6 contact with abandoned guinea pigs play in rescue in
7 city parks and has collaboration between agencies
8 been effective in addressing the issue?

9 ALEXANDRA SILVER: So, park rangers and others
10 can bring guinea pigs to ACC. In terms of
11 collaboration, I would say the issues seems to be not
12 so much one of agency collaboration but rather of the
13 sheer number of guinea pigs that are being given up
14 by members of the public. So, most of ACC's guinea
15 pigs are brought in directly by owners to ACC. And
16 this is good because it means they're not being
17 abandoned. However, we need to decrease the number
18 of guinea pigs needing shelter.

19 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What physical condition
20 have abandoned guinea pigs been found in and how many
21 need immediate medical care?

22 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Our experience is that they
23 come in all shapes and forms. There could be ones
24 that need medical attention right away. Some of them
25 have been found with ringworm, very contagious. You

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2 need to op on that immediately. We've also, they're
3 not spayed, so we find they're pregnant. They're in
4 all kinds of conditions. I can't - I don't have the
5 information about exactly what they are but each
6 guinea pig requires the attention of someone from our
7 veterinary staff to take a look at them.

8 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So, I realize that there's
9 only a couple of veterinarians that do the spaying.
10 Any vet can actually take care of their other medical
11 conditions?

12 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Yeah, generally, just checking
13 the health and you know and the safety and the
14 condition that the guinea pig is in, we're absolutely
15 able to do that but the surgery is so specialized
16 that we have to send them out to a specialist.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, what are the costs
18 of keeping a guinea pig in an ACC shelter?

19 ALEXANDRA SILVER: So, I want to talk a little
20 bit, not, we don't have a specific cost per guinea
21 pig but it's really about resources and how much a
22 guinea pig, no matter how small it is relative to a
23 dog or a cat, how many resources that animal takes.

24 And so, it's food, it's housing, it's cleaning,
25 it's staff time. It's making sure that they have

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2 enrichment. It's keeping them separate because it's
3 really hard to determine the sex of a guinea pig, so
4 that they don't reproduce in the shelter. So, it's a
5 drain on resources in that it takes so much time and
6 I think there's a misperception that because they're
7 so small, they're so easy to take care of, which is
8 not the case.

9 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We've heard of the \$20,000
10 guinea pig tower but does ACC have a total cost
11 associated with the increase in guinea pig surrenders
12 since May of 2022?

13 ALEXANDRA SILVER: I don't have the total cost
14 and the tower is something that we tried. It's state
15 of the art housing. I mean, we're getting so many,
16 we have to think of ideas and ways to keep them
17 humanely housed. We don't have any plans to buy
18 another tower. You know that had a lot of good
19 attributes in terms of how many you can house. We
20 don't have -

21 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You know what? I'm going
22 to ask my colleagues if they'd like to ask any
23 questions now and I'll come back later.
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2 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: I think – are we seeing a
3 comparable number of rabbits that are coming into the
4 ACC system or is it just guinea pigs?

5 ALEXANDRA SILVER: We still have rabbits coming
6 in but it's really leveled off. We don't see big
7 spikes the way the guinea pigs are really moving
8 upward and it's not changing. It's going up and we
9 also see that a lot of them are being surrendered
10 after about a year. A little you know, a year or
11 two, which is a little troubling because I think that
12 that shows you that people are getting them just for
13 sort of a short term, I need a little pet and that's
14 not how we would counsel the adoption of a guinea
15 pig.

16 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, I mean, I've heard,
17 I've heard from many people who actually love guinea
18 pigs. They think that they're like you know, the
19 cutest little critters ever and they are but they
20 take a lot of work. They do, they take a lot of
21 work.

22 So, understanding the sterilization challenges,
23 are you able to sterilize all of the guinea pigs
24 prior to adoption?

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ALEXANDRA SILVER: That is a challenge because we rely on outside vet services. And so, there could be three weeks before we can get an appointment. It's not easy to get an appointment. Like I said, they're considered exotics and that unfortunately increases how long the guinea pig has to stay in the shelter and then, uhm, if we can get them out unaltered, we work with the partners who take them to hopefully get them altered. That surgery is a tough one. I know someone is going to testify about it and it gives you more insight into why we really need to control the population of guinea pigs.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Has ACC ever had a specialist on board, a staff member, a doctor, right? So, a saw a veterinarian that was assigned to that level of care or is it something that -

ALEXANDRA SILVER: In my tenure and as being at ACC for over ten years, I don't recall a specialist. I do think at some point we were able to do surgery on guinea pigs. Here's what's going on across the nation, there's a shortage of veterinarians and we're struggling just to keep pace with dogs and cats. And this is a specialized surgery that takes a lot more time and detail.

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2 So, we don't really have the resources to devote
3 to the guinea pigs and uhm, you need a highly trained
4 veterinarian that needs to do it.

5 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, it's really about
6 creating the workforce and I think we're seeing that
7 in a lot of places in New York City. A lot of
8 agencies, hospitals, uhm, you know healthcare
9 facilities where we just don't have the staffing
10 ratio's that we need to adequately you know be able
11 to do our job.

12 So, because of that challenge, then if I'm coming
13 in to ACC to adopt a guinea pig, am I allowed to
14 adopt one guinea pig or two?

15 ALEXANDRA SILVER: You can adopt two guinea pigs.

16 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: But then who makes the
17 distinction?

18 ALEXANDRA SILVER: They would be the same sex.

19 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay, and how do you
20 determine that? Because my understanding is it is
21 very difficult.

22 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Yeah, that's not easy either.
23 But to the extent that our vets are able to identify
24 same sex like, maybe there are obvious ones and I
25 don't want to speak - I'm not a vet and I don't want

1
2 to diminish how difficult that their job is but I
3 think that there are some guinea pigs who we know are
4 male or female and we would only adopt out same sex
5 pairs.

6 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Wow and on a separate note
7 because I know you know I'm also concerned about an
8 increase of surrenders to you know dogs and cats.
9 Throughout the pandemic, we suspended, I know that
10 ASPCA suspended the spay and neuter program
11 temporarily, the mobile spay and neuter program. Are
12 there any facilities that are currently doing that at
13 low-cost rates to families that may not be able to
14 afford to you know, to go to a private practice?

15 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Is this specifically for
16 guinea pigs or just animals generally?

17 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: No, animals generally.

18 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Oh, okay. Yeah, we work with
19 a lot of local vets for low cost spay/neuter days.
20 PCA does a lot of spay/neuter for us. The pandemic
21 really slowed things down but again, there's
22 definitely a backlog and its national. It's not just
23 New York City, there is a real shortage of
24 veterinarians and not just veterinarians but people
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2 who work in vet services. You need veterinary
3 support as well as the doctor to do the surgeries.

4 Its - there are, there are low-cost options in
5 New York City, it's just that there is a backlog.

6 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, and in terms of, I
7 just want to piggyback off of a question that Council
8 Member Schulman asked regarding advertisement and
9 really, like what is the messaging right around
10 adoption, responsible adoption citywide specifically
11 leading up to like you know Christmas and you know I
12 know that during Easter right, we see a spike and
13 interest and in parents getting puppies and then you
14 know all sorts of animals for their children as
15 presents.

16 Is there some sort of public campaign that helps
17 you know to better inform the community about the
18 impact of adoption? Well, of purchasing an animal?

19 ALEXANDRA SILVER: So, we currently have a social
20 media campaign that's a marketing director about
21 gifting animals during the holiday season and in
22 terms of a campaign to educate people, for us, it's
23 so important now you know Council Member Ayala,
24 you've been to the shelter. You have to step into
25 ACC to understand that animal adoption is all about.

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And so, the campaign that we put out there is giving people information about why you should adopt and all the great animals that we have and once we peak your interest, the conversation begins with, this is what's involved. And then there are different types of animals or different level of animals of you know size, behavior, etc., that will suit what you need.

And so, the best education is a conversation right there about what this will entail. And sometimes people say, I need to think about it, which is really great instead of just like, coming in and you know picking out an animal and leaving and then, we really want to make sure that this is going to last and that this is going to be a healthy choice for the human and the animal.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, the last time I was there, there was a Charlie there that wanted to adopt me. Yeah, I had my two pups who unfortunately have passed and so my husband threatened me if I brought in another animal, he would leave but most definitely I remember. It was interesting because Mark Levine passed by the dog and the dog didn't react and as soon as I stepped - I don't want to say, I'm not

1
2 saying anything but as soon as I stood next to him,
3 he went crazy. But thank you guys for all that you
4 do. I'm going to leave you in really good hands. I
5 have a public housing hearing across the street and
6 as you understand, I have a lot of challenges as well
7 specifically around heating season but I want to
8 thank you for all of the work that you do. Not only
9 around this issue but uhm, around the multitude of
10 issues that you face day in and day out and I know
11 that you know you're doing a lot of work with limited
12 resources. And you know I lost two of my dogs, the
13 two dogs that I lost. ACC was very good to us
14 because when I call her Gucka, I found her. She was
15 a mix, I think Gucka was a mix between a squirrel
16 and Chikwawa.

17 And she was the cutest thing, at least I thought
18 so. She was very elderly and uhm, started seizing
19 during the pandemic and it got like really, really
20 bad and we had to put her down and there was nowhere
21 to go. And ACC was kind enough to take her in and
22 you know help us through that process, which was
23 very, very difficult. Uhm, so thank you, you know so
24 much for that. It really meant a lot to my family
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2 and I. So, thank you all and I leave you in good
3 hands.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you Speaker Ayala
5 very much. Where's your little one? Oh, there he
6 is. The little one's leaving too. Let him say
7 goodbye to everybody. Ahh look at that, look at
8 that.

9

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: He's so smart but he's so
10 bad. Don't let this little face -

11

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: He doesn't really bite, he
12 puts your finger in his mouth, he doesn't do
13 anything. Council Member Narcisse, do you want to
14 ask any questions?

15

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Good morning. Uhm, I
16 really appreciate - oh, I was not on mute but you
17 heard me right? Yeah, so my husband is between my
18 cousin, I mean in my house, then my children always
19 picking what they want. I don't want this. Up till
20 now, I'm still you know going through the process.
21 My daughter just opened my eyes on babysitting. I
22 didn't know that you can babysit dogs by different
23 folks, so now saying, I told her. I don't think I'm
24 going to pay but she managed to know how to get a dog
25 every two or three weeks. So, I appreciate the work

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2 that you're doing. That's the bottom line. My
3 question in terms of guinea pig, what is the course
4 of sheltering guinea pigs in the shelter system?

5 ALEXANDRA SILVER: I don't have an exact dollar
6 amount per guinea pig and again, it goes back to just
7 resources generally. What we do is we look at the
8 root cause. Our mission is to end animal
9 homelessness in New York City. The number of stray
10 and surrendered and particularly surrendered animals
11 that are guinea pigs that are coming in, there's a
12 problem there. They each take a level of care just
13 like a dog, just like a cat. It's cleaning, it's
14 feeding, it's housing. You know so I don't, I don't
15 have it broken down by animal but just again, because
16 they're small, it's not - they're taking as much
17 resources from our team as a cat is taking or a
18 rabbit is taking.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yeah, what percentage
20 is that of the animal shelters, like if you say in
21 total, what is the percentage you say roughly? If
22 you have a pig, a guinea pig or you have a dog?

23 ALEXANDRA SILVER: So, we currently have cats and
24 dogs combined annually this year. It's about 14,000
25 and the total for guinea pigs this year looks like it

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2 will get close to 1,000. We're nearly at 800 as of
3 today.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I believe my colleague
5 just uhm alluded to it but having a way of
6 communicating with - especially the young folks. Let
7 me say, the people that's not getting paid, that
8 don't have a paycheck are the ones that want all the
9 animals and all the exotic most of the time. So, now
10 we the parents would like to know that how much of
11 course, not just oops are they in. So, is that a way
12 that we can communicate that.

13 ALEXANDRA SILVER: I'm sorry, I'm not -

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Like, to say how much
15 it will cost actually to have a guinea pig in your
16 house.

17 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Oh - if you adopt a guinea
18 pig?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yes.

20 ALEXADRA SILVER: What would it cost you -

21 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And to my -

22 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Yeah, I can get back to you
23 with that. We can figure out like how much they eat
24 on average and they use specialized hay, the housing,
25 we can get you those numbers.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: The way I see it, I'm
3 going to keep my cat.

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ALEXANDRA SILVER: There's a cost involved.
5 Obviously, you know there's - but off hand I wouldn't
6 be able to tell you but we can get you that.

7

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Alright, thank you.

8

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We've been joined by
9 Council Member Yeger. Do you have any questions
10 Council Member? Okay, so I want to follow-up about
11 my colleague Council Member Narcisse. So, is there a
12 way to educate kids in schools about what it would
13 mean for them to - you know because to her point, you
14 know kids always want an animal. They don't realize
15 the extent of the obligation and all of that. Is
16 there a way to maybe get that into the schools as to
17 what that means?

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ALEXANDRA SILVER: Absolutely and we have a
19 humane education program. The pandemic sort of
20 sidelined it for a bit but we're rolling it back out.
21 Guinea pigs will absolutely be up there and again,
22 you know I know we're talking about guinea pigs but
23 really it's the care.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: In general.

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2 ALEXANDRA SILVER: The care of any animal and
3 about adoption and so, that is a program that we are
4 investing in.

5 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: If there's any way that we
6 could be helpful in that too because we all have
7 districts where we have the schools and I think that
8 would be a nice thing to do and what that means and
9 actually even talk to kids about fostering or working
10 with their families and things like that.

11 You know there's a lot of stress amongst the
12 students now post COVID, so maybe that's a way to
13 work on that.

14 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Absolutely.

15 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So, how far – how many
16 guinea pigs have been adopted through ACC?

17 ALEXANDRA SILVER: To date, we have adopted close
18 to 200.

19 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

20 ALEXANDRA SILVER: And then we also work with the
21 rescue community, what we called New Hope partners
22 and they have taken from us over 500.

23 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, that's great. Do
24 adoptees bring the guinea pigs back to the shelter?
25 I don't know if it's too soon to figure that out but?

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2 ALEXANDRA SILVER: Yeah, I don't know that
3 specifically but I will say that anyone who adopts
4 any animal from us, we're always in touch. If there
5 is any issue and if they want to surrender, you know
6 we'll work. Is it resources? It's just so costly.
7 Then we learn from that because then it says to us,
8 well we didn't give them enough information or what's
9 the situation that you're in? How can we help you?
10 And many times, we'll try and find a solution. So, I
11 don't know that specifically, I can look back and get
12 you that answer.

13 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

14 ALEXANDRA SILVER: I do know though just looking
15 at our intake data that owners surrender generally,
16 not knowing if they were adopted from ACC but owner
17 surrender is much higher than stray. So, it's
18 definitely an education issue and just an
19 availability of guinea pigs if people are not
20 thinking about them for a lifelong pet.

21 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay and maybe there's a
22 way with DOHMH to talk about even illnesses that the
23 pets get or people have to look out for because I
24 know there was something just recently about dog flu
25 and things like that and maybe there's a way we can

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2 just educate folks too in terms of taking care of the
3 pet and combine those.

4 I have no further questions, so I want to thank
5 you all very much and we really appreciate the
6 testimony. I do want to also say that in my previous
7 role working in the Speaker's office before I became
8 a Council Member, I visited ACC because I had
9 healthcare under my – as part of my agencies that I
10 had to oversee. And so, you do a lot with few
11 resources and we can talk about some other things and
12 what we can do to you know make that better. And I
13 also put money in this fiscal year's budget for a
14 place in Queens because there really isn't a place in
15 Queens in terms of uhm, bringing the animals and so,
16 anyway, thank you very much and uh –

17 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Chair, I just want to
18 make a correction. My cat is my baby. Thank you. I
19 want to make sure the correction is me because he's
20 my baby but not everybody baby.

21 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Before you go, there's
22 uhm, my colleague Council Member Hudson is Chairing a
23 hearing. We're going to see if she just has any
24 questions and then – okay, just give us a minute.
25 We'll just take a minute. Thank you.

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Council Member Hudson is coming, so just give it a minute. So, I want to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member Hudson and Council Member, would you like to ask any question of the panel? No, okay. Okay, with that then uhm, thank you very much, really appreciate it. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair and thank you very much to the members of the Administration. We will now turn to testimony from the public. I'd like to remind everyone that I will call up individuals in panels and all testimony will be limited to two minutes. We will be strictly enforcing that time limit, due to the number of people that have registered to testify.

So, please try to stick to it as best you can. As a reminder, you can submit written testimony and we, as the Committee staff, review it in full. You can submit testimony up to the record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. We will hear in person panels first with the possibility of – we will go two in person panels first and then move to remote panel and then proceed uhm, as next going forward.

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The first in person panel will be Allie Taylor from Voters for Animal Rights, Libby Post from New York State Animal Protection Federation, Elizabeth Cabrera Holtz from World Animal Protection US, Maisy Sylvan from the ASPCA, and Lyle Cleary from the Center for Avian and Exotic Medicine.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We also want to remind the panelist that testimony, we're going to limit testimony to two minutes if you can summarize if you have long testimony, please do that and then submit it to us. We have a lot of people that want to testify today and we want to make sure that we get to everybody. Thank you. You can proceed whenever you're ready.

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ALLIE TAYLOR: Good morning, my name is Allie Taylor. I am the President of Voters for Animal Rights or VFAR in New York City. Thank you Speaker Adams, Chairperson Schulman and the Committee on Health for holding today's hearing.

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Thank you to Deputy Speaker Ayala for your leadership on the bill and to the 34 Council Members who have cosponsored Intro. 4. We recognize and appreciate that this is the first piece of animal protection legislation taken up by the new City

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2 Council. And we're grateful to you for prioritizing
3 this time sensitive matter.

4 I also want to thank the animal advocates
5 testifying today and to remind all of us that while I
6 understand that there are many animal issues that we
7 care about deeply, today's hearing is focusing
8 specifically on guinea pigs. So, let's all please be
9 respectful of the Council's time by staying on topic.

10 I want to give some background on how this bill
11 came to be. In the fall of 2021, our colleagues at
12 ACC came to us for help with brainstorming ideas on
13 how to stop the increasing and untenable influx of
14 hundreds of guinea pigs surrendered annually to the
15 shelters. We knew from our experience working on
16 stopping puppy mills that pet stores would never
17 volunteer to do that right thing and stop selling
18 guinea pigs as merchandise. We agree that
19 legislative action, like the successful 2014 law that
20 ban the sale of rabbits in New York City pet stores
21 is the only means to a true permanent solution.

22 Pet stores who sell guinea pigs for around \$50.00
23 have openly admitted that they don't provide vet care
24 for illnesses, injuries or spay/neuter because this
25 would cut into their profit margins.

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2 Pet stores will sell guinea pigs to anyone who
3 walks through the door and their motivation is to
4 sell their inventory as quickly as possible. Guinea
5 pigs are impulse buys. Because they are sensitive
6 animals with complex needs, people often surrender
7 them after the novelty wears off, creating a crisis
8 in our city's animal shelters and rescues.
9 Additionally, New Yorkers have been abandoning guinea
10 pigs in city parks, which is a death sentence for the
11 animals. They cannot survive in the wild and will
12 either starve to death or be attacked by predators.
13 By contrast, when guinea pigs are adopted out to
14 individuals -

15 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah, go ahead.

16 ALLIE TAYLOR: Okay. Uhm, by contrast, when
17 guinea pigs are adopted out to individuals or
18 families from shelters or rescues, potential adopters
19 are carefully screened to ensure that they have the
20 time, resources, lifestyle and support to provide a
21 loving forever home. Shelters and rescues also
22 provide education, so that adopters understand how to
23 care for their animals and to provide an environment
24 for the guinea pig to thrive in. They're adopted out
25 to homes where they feel confident that the adopter

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2 understands that this is a commitment for the
3 lifetime of the guinea pig. Therefore, they are far
4 less likely to be surrendered to a shelter in the
5 future. VFAR is proud to support Intro. 4, which
6 represents a critical step towards ensuring that all
7 companion animals have safe homes while also reducing
8 the burden on our overwhelmed shelter system.

9 This bill is commonsense humane legislation and
10 we urge the City Council to move swiftly on the bill.
11 As any delay will only increase the number of
12 unwanted guinea pigs. Thank you.

13 LIBBY POST: Good morning, my name is Libby Post.
14 I'm the Executive Director of the New York State
15 Animal Protection Federation. I represent all the
16 animal shelters in the State of New York. I'm here
17 to talk about the impact of the sale of guinea pigs
18 on the city's shelter system, the Animal Care Center
19 of New York, which is one of the federations members.

20 Guinea pigs are coming into ACC at an
21 unprecedented rate as we already heard. In 2020 they
22 recorded 357 guinea pigs coming into their care from
23 January to November. In 2022 during that same time,
24 they've taken 777, that's a 117 percent increase.
25 They're now the – guinea pigs are now the third

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2 largest species coming into ACC in terms of numbers
3 not size and while ACC rescue partners try to help by
4 pulling as many as they can, they too are
5 overwhelmed. It's not just that stores are breeding
6 and selling the guinea pigs. It's that they're
7 selling guinea pigs unaltered and offering with their
8 sex mislabeled.

9 According to testimony before this Committee of
10 April 30, 2014, Pet Smart stated that they can't
11 source sterilized guinea pigs and of course their
12 sterilizing in store would be prohibited.
13 Unsuspecting consumers are bringing home pairs of
14 guinea pigs sold as same sex, only to find out 60
15 days later they purchased a male and a female and
16 guinea pigs can mate every two months.

17 And so, many times owners have stated that they
18 are unable to return their guinea pigs to stores, so
19 ACC is the only option and at this point, ACC as we
20 know are overrun. There's momentum among New Yorkers
21 to create a more humane community. The New York
22 State legislator passed the Puppy Mill Pipeline Bill
23 sponsored by the city's own State Senator Michael
24 Gianaris and Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal. The
25 bill will end the sale of dogs, cats and rabbits in

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2 pet stores, banning the sale of guinea pigs in pet
3 stores in New York City is a simple and effective way
4 to stop the influx at its source. We must continue
5 to increase adoptions and encourage people to adopt
6 not shop but we also need to address the root cause
7 of pet overpopulation in shelters.

8 Thank you for the opportunity to come before you
9 today and I hope that you vote yes on this and move
10 this forward because it will be a consequential bill
11 in moving New York City's record as a humane city
12 forward. Thank you.

13 DR. LYLE CLEARY: Hi, I'm Dr. Lyle Cleary from
14 the Center for Avian Exotic Medicine. We are one of
15 the three hospitals in the city that do exclusively
16 exotics. Uhm, I love my job but there's two
17 surgeries that make me question my life choice and
18 one of them is a guinea pig spay. If you look at the
19 diagram I provided, number 12, that is our little
20 ovary but to get to it, you have to basically hold
21 the giant water balloon. That's number 11, which is
22 the cecum. It's kind of like trying to get a piece
23 of gum out of the bottom of the inside of your shoe
24 while there's a full water balloon there without
25 popping it.

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2 Pretty unpleasant. The cost of this to consumers
3 is about \$600-\$800 for the spay. At best, we do help
4 out the ACC where I think what's usually like \$200-
5 \$250 per pig. Unlike dogs and cats, where it's very
6 easy to put in a catheter, intubate them, make
7 anesthesia safer, it's really, really hard with these
8 guys. Most of the time, we have to settle for a
9 mask, which does work pretty well but not as ideal.

10 There are less than ten veterinarians in all five
11 boroughs that can spay a guinea pig, even in a
12 hospital like Cat Nip and Carrots where they only do
13 small mammals and cats, they don't spay guinea pigs.
14 Only two or three of the five vets at my hospital
15 spay guinea pigs. It's unpleasant. Uhm,
16 postoperatively that is where you get a lot of
17 issues. Many go into GI stasis, if they stop eating,
18 their gut shuts down, they shut down and they die.
19 Even in an ACC setting, like that's about every eight
20 hours if you're doing a syringe feeding, that's about
21 one-man hour per pig for the up to a week post-op
22 when they're not eating. That's a lot of time. It's
23 not an easy outpatient surgery like a dog and cat
24 spay where you send them home the same day. It is
25 intensive care. We don't even send them out the same

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2 day unless we know exactly what – well, unless it's
3 like a shelter that we know can handle it or
4 otherwise we keep them in the hospital.

5 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I want you to just keep –
6 it's important, so just keep going.

7 DR. LYLE CLEARY: Okay, awesome thanks. Uhm, if
8 they give birth after six months of age, they are
9 prone to dystocia's, which you know, that's a \$1,00-
10 \$2,500 surgery and emergent, animals die, not just
11 the babies. You know they're highly prolific.
12 Accidental birth lead to more accidental birth. You
13 talked about the 20 pigs found in Staten Island.
14 That was probably – they might have had those pigs as
15 few as nine months. It's you know, one accidental
16 birth, everyone keeps everyone, they're breeding
17 again.

18 The females if you don't spay them are prone
19 ovarian cysts. A recent study showed that everywhere
20 from 50-60 percent of all guinea pigs in a large
21 retrospective study had reproductive pathology,
22 that's tumors, ovarian cysts, endometritis, all sorts
23 of stuff. It basically means, we really got to spay
24 them. It is hard to spay them if they're under six
25 months old but you know in the first like – they can

1
2 breed as soon as four or five months just because
3 their ligaments just haven't stretched out, just
4 makes the space so much harder.

5 Uhm, yeah, the cysts basically do end up killing
6 most intact female guinea pigs. They require a
7 special diet and care that time and time again, you
8 the 16-year-old at Petco just isn't telling this
9 owners. I, you know, yes, it's making more work for
10 me. My house is more profitable because like,
11 there's all these mistakes but honestly it's just not
12 worth it to these animals. You know, they're impulse
13 buys. People think they're starter pets and they are
14 not a starter pet. They are far from it.

15 Most of the one's we see right out of the store,
16 there's like, they have been shipped across country,
17 highly stressed young animals. They have ringworm.
18 A lot them have respiratory infections. You know we
19 have to take out eyes every now and then because they
20 have really bad corneal ulcers. They just come in in
21 the worst state and owners are given like you know a
22 bag of like junk food pallets and said, oh yeah feed
23 them a banana a day and that can kill them.

24 Because there's only three hospitals in the five
25 boroughs that do exclusively exotics, there's a lot

1
2 of room for really bad care on the veterinary side.
3 A vet who sees mostly dogs and cats, which is 95
4 percent of all veterinarians, them seeing a guinea
5 pig is like them seeing a horse, really not
6 appropriate in my opinion. Like yeah, basic stuff
7 they can help and give a kind of idea but time and
8 time again, I see referrals from other hospitals
9 where the owners just haven't been told the right
10 things. They don't even know about spaying and they
11 give them antibiotics that frankly can kill them,
12 whereas like dog and cats drink it up like water. It
13 is such different medicine, highly specialized and
14 it's not available to everyone and frankly, I can
15 understand why most vets don't do it. You have like,
16 in exotics you make 20, 30 percent less than you do
17 in dog and cat.

18 So, it's not exactly as viable but yeah, I mean
19 they're just not starter pets. They're animals that
20 are just you know tend to be really skittish. They
21 are a prey species. Being around dogs and cats, like
22 just will even put them into stasis. I've seen some
23 go into cardiac arrest just from the scent of them.
24 So, even doing these spays and neuters in a shelter
25 setting, they don't always go well. Just because

1
2 like, I mean yeah, they sometimes just have strokes
3 like coming out of surgery just because of the high
4 stress. They smell a predator and they go into like
5 a little flight, flight sinkable episode. But yeah,
6 hopefully this is a wake-up call. The city starts
7 getting this under control finally.

8 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much.
9 Okay, after everyone speaks, I have a couple of
10 questions so we'll wait for them. Thank you.

11 MAISY SYLVAN: Good morning, my name is Maisy
12 Sylvan. I'm a Government Relations Manager for the
13 American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to
14 Animals. On behalf of the ASPCA I would like to
15 thank Deputy Speaker Ayala for introducing Intro. 4,
16 and Health Committee Chair for the opportunity to
17 testify this morning.

18 The ASPCA has served New York City for over 150
19 years, and you find information about our New York
20 programs and services in our submitted testimony.

21 The ASPCA works very closely with and strongly
22 supports animal care centers of New York to help
23 advance their efforts to reduce euthanasia, increase
24 adoptions and placement and improve access to the
25 care for the city's most vulnerable animals.

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2 Since 2017, ACC has maintained a placement rate
3 of more than 90 percent, making New York City one of
4 the nation's leaders in the placement of dogs, cats,
5 and rabbits among high-intake shelters. Ensuring that
6 ACC has the resources necessary to continue this
7 critical, life-saving work remains a priority for our
8 organization. The passage of Intro. 4 would help
9 prevent guinea pigs from overburdening our shelters
10 and rescues and encourage the adoption of guinea pigs
11 from ACC.

12 From the start of the pandemic to the
13 introduction of this bill in February, ACC shelters
14 have taken in over 1,000 guinea pigs. This year
15 alone, 600 have entered the shelter system, more than
16 double pre-pandemic numbers. Of these, most are
17 under three years old, indicating they were pandemic
18 purchases, 61 percent were originally purchased from
19 a pet store, and the vast majority of them were not
20 sterilized since pet stores and owners often forego
21 sterilization. Guinea pigs reproduce in significant
22 numbers in short periods of time, resulting in
23 unwanted litters that are commonly dumped in the
24 city's shelters and parks.

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2 This population surge has forced ACC to invest
3 over \$20,000 in infrastructure at the same time that
4 they are facing significant challenges with increased
5 dog and cat populations, space shortages and
6 increased funding needs. We need to make sure that
7 ACC can maintain and enhance their levels of service
8 to the public and this legislation serves as an
9 important step toward meeting this essential goal.
10 Thank you.

11 ELIZABETH CABRERA HOLTZ: Hi, my name is Liz
12 Cabrera Holtz and I am an Attorney and Campaign
13 Manager at World Animal Protection. I am speaking
14 today about the cruel conditions in which guinea pigs
15 are bred. So, where these guinea pigs are coming
16 from before they arrive at pet stores. Consumers
17 rarely think about where the guinea pig they purchase
18 came from but the answer is disturbing. Virtually
19 all animals sold in pet stores from small stores to
20 big box stores like Pet Smart and Petco come from
21 commercial breeding facilities referred to as mills
22 in which pain and suffering and rampant.

23 In mills, the goal is to produce as many animals
24 as cheaply as possible. Animals are kept in
25 stressful, crowded, unsanitary conditions and ill and

1
2 injured animals receive little to no veterinary care.
3 While the Federal Animal Welfare Act does regulate
4 guinea pig mills, it provides minimal protections and
5 is chronically under enforced. Mills regulated by
6 the animal welfare act have long track records of
7 poor animal care.

8 Homes Farm in Pennsylvania is just one example
9 that illustrates the suffering guinea pigs endure in
10 mills. Homes Farm house more than 15,000 animals,
11 supplying guinea pigs and other small mammals to pet
12 stores including Pet Smart and Petco. At homes,
13 farms, sick animals or those deemed unfit for sale
14 were killed with carbon dioxide or left to die in
15 freezers, even as some tried to escape. The U.S.
16 Department of Agriculture Inspection Reports
17 documented numerous animal welfare act violations
18 such as decomposing animals, filthy cases,
19 cannibalization and animals in desperate need of
20 veterinary care.

21 Those animals included guinea pigs whose bodies
22 were covered in scabs and whose eyes were crusted
23 shut. Homes Farm isn't unusual, Sun Pet Limited,
24 another Petco and Pet Smart supplier is still in
25 operation. Supplies, uhm, it has numerous animal

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2 welfare act violations going back years. In one
3 document, in one inspection report, the USDA
4 documented severely ill animals, fifth and crusted
5 tanks, and animals unable to access drinking water.
6 In the single report, the inspector also reported 22
7 hamster enclosures had cannibalism occurring in them.

8 According to the American Veterinary Medical
9 Association, which conducts the most comprehensive
10 survey of households with companion animals in the
11 US, the number one source of guinea pigs purchased as
12 companions is brick and mortar pet stores. Meaning
13 this bill would take a significant step towards
14 shutting down these mills. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. So,
16 one I had a question. Dr. Cleary, is there - I know
17 about the - what you talked about the spaying but is
18 there birth control for guinea pigs?

19 DR. LYLE CLEARY: So, people did experiment with
20 a deslorelin implant. It's about \$700-\$800 per
21 implant. It only last six months and it doesn't even
22 prevent the ovarian cysts unfortunately.

23 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So, there's no like
24 medication or any, okay.

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DR. LYLE CLEARY: No, I mean hey, if you wanted to do a deslorelin implant every six months but most owners, if they're not going to spay them, they probably won't do that and they still get the ovarian cysts, which is what kills most females.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Right, and I know it's difficult to tell the sex. Why is that?

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DR. LYLE CLEARY: You know, they fool even me sometimes. There, I mean they're fast growing. You know before the balls drop on the balls, sometimes the penis - like you know it's a spectrum sometimes. There's like, it's kind of an art and even then I get it wrong. It's just, you know there's no external testicles. There's no I mean; they don't really have much of a penis on them. Like, it's within, so it's not like you're seeing it hanging out there. It's not obvious, even to us who do it every day.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you and I also want to - I want to give a shout out to Voters for Animal Rights and Allie Taylor. I want everyone to know that they are a purely volunteer organization that do a tremendous amount of work. I've worked with Allie - oh, look at that. I've worked with Allie for a very long time. I don't even know, I thought you

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2 might have met Elvis, my dog. Because I ran in 2009,
3 Elvis was still alive and he was actually a big part
4 of my campaign. So, uhm, I just want to say that
5 because and she and I talk all the time and we talk
6 about not just this but other things.

7

I also want to tell you that I am committed to
8 making sure that whatever we have to go through
9 logistically in terms of the Council that we'll get
10 this to the floor to a vote as soon as we can at the
11 first possible moment that we can do that. So, I
12 want to make that commitment here.

13

And so, and I want to thank the panel. We
14 appreciate your testimony and we want to thank you
15 for coming in here today. Oh, I'm sorry, I also want
16 to acknowledge that we've been joined by my colleague
17 Council Member Feliz. Do you have any questions?

18

Okay, thank you.

19

Yeah, before we go to the next panel, we're going
20 to take a five-minute break okay, alright.

21

BREAK [1:07:20-1:18:07]

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Apologies but we'll be
23 starting again in about five minutes. Thank you for
24 your patience.

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BREAK [1:18:12-1:22:14]

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Alright, at this time, we ask if you could please find your seats, we are going to resume the hearing. If everybody can please find their seats. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now call the second in person panel. It will be Brian Hackett from Animal Legal Defense Fund, Alexandra LaFata from Vegan Muse, Meagan Licari from Puppy Kitty New York City, Brian Shapiro from the Humane Society and Cindy Stutts from Bunnies and Beyond. You may begin when ready.

BRIAN HACKETT: Good morning. My name is Brian Hackett, I'm the Legislative Affairs Manager for the Animal Legal Defense Fund. On behalf of our members and supporters throughout the five boroughs, I just wanted to thank the Committee and the Council and Speaker Adams for entertaining this hearing and this very important discussion about this crisis facing the city and of course, our organization is in support of the legislation.

On a personal level, I wanted to thank and recognize the tremendous staff at the New York ACC for their dedication and hard work in the midst of tremendous challenges facing animal shelters

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2 throughout the country. I'm a proud parent of quite
3 a few adopted animals from New York ACC, so it all
4 holds a very special place in my heart and I just
5 wanted to personally, publicly, acknowledge that.

6 Because so much has already been stated as to the
7 merits of and the need for this legislation, I'd
8 rather just briefly make note about animal protection
9 legislation like this and respectfully encourage the
10 Council to consider entertaining legislation that
11 helps protect animals that's so broadly supported by
12 the city and just make sense on a financial,
13 political and a social position and standpoint.

14 Animal protection legislation whether it be the
15 puppy mill pipeline bill before Governor Hochul or
16 this piece of legislation or so many other examples,
17 really have the ability to bring communities together
18 because animals garner so much support, whether they
19 be cats or dogs or you know guinea pigs or horses or
20 any other type of animal.

21 So, with that, I just want to thank the Council
22 and thank Speaker Adams for entertaining this and
23 extend the appreciation of our members to all of you.
24 Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Next.

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2 BRIAN SHAPIRO: Dear Chairperson Schulman and
3 honorable Committee Members. My name is Brian
4 Shapiro, New York State Director for the Humane
5 Society of United States representing our members and
6 supporters in New York City and speaking in favor of
7 Intro. 4. Animal shelters across New York State are
8 facing unprecedented challenges in accepting ever
9 increasing numbers of companion animals surrendered
10 by the public. New York City Animal Care Centers is
11 no exception with a 117 percent intake increase since
12 2020. In particular, the HSUS has tracked the
13 shocking increase of guinea pig intakes at ACC and
14 we've even seen rescues outside of the city
15 attempting to assist with this overflow of small,
16 cheap and unaltered animals that originate from New
17 York City itself. Many are abandoned in city parks
18 as was noted where they will die. These lively high
19 maintenance animals may be purchased for what is
20 often less than the average price of a single beer in
21 New York City.

22 This legislation would implement protection
23 similar to a law passed by the City Council in 2014
24 addressing the sale of rabbits within city limits.
25 This law was put in place to help ACC cope with the

1
2 deluge of rabbit surrenders impacting the
3 organization. The HSUS supports similar action now
4 to help ACC weather this storm and respectively urges
5 the Committee on Health to pass Intro. 4. This
6 legislation is also supported by our affiliate
7 organization, the Humane Society Veterinary Medical
8 Association, HSVMA and our letter of support is
9 included for your consideration.

10 Thank you for the opportunity to present this
11 information and for your service to this wonderful
12 city.

13 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next.

14 MEAGAN LICARI: Good morning. My name is Meagan
15 Licari and I am President of Puppy Kitty New York
16 City. Thank you allowing me the opportunity to
17 testify today.

18 On May 5th, I was alerted to a situation in
19 Elmhurst Queens of a guinea pig running through the
20 brush on the side of a road, via a Facebook group
21 post. When we headed over and started to look
22 through the bushes, we kept finding more and more
23 guinea pigs. We had chase them through the thick
24 brush and we were able to rescue eight animals that
25 day. It was very difficult for them and for us as

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2 they were hiding in drain holes and heavy brush. One
3 actually died likely due to stress. They were
4 terrified and starving and it was clear that they
5 were dumped in this location with little chances at
6 survival.

7 Most people get guinea pigs from stores not
8 really realizing how quickly they can reproduce and
9 how fragile they are. It is around \$500 for me to
10 neuter a pet. It's around \$500 to neuter a pet who
11 was purchased on a whim for \$50. I have neutered all
12 the males at \$500.

13 Several of those guinea pigs have also become ill
14 and we had to hospitalize them for over \$1,000. This
15 is not financially feasible for most people or
16 privately funded rescues like Puppy Kitty New York
17 City. People don't realize the care they require.
18 They are actually quite costly to feed. Feeding hay,
19 pellets and fresh vegies. It's also important for
20 them to get enrichment.

21 They are also a prey species, so it's not natural
22 for them to like being held. Getting them used to
23 being held takes a long time in socialization.
24 People who usually purchase guinea pigs are for their
25 children who want a pet that they can hold. When

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2 they realize they don't like to be held, they often
3 become neglected and left in small cages. We have
4 taken many owner surrendered guinea pigs that are in
5 horrible conditions with overgrown nails and filthy
6 cages.

7 I am one of 15 New Hope partners who take guinea
8 pigs. I have not been able to take many animals this
9 year because I have so many of my own. Also, they
10 are no longer able to sterilize them before pulling
11 them, like they do with cats and dogs.

12 Guinea pigs are a huge financial burden on my
13 small rescue. Adoption rates are low because people
14 see them in stores and they likely don't realize the
15 crisis. They are usually impulse buys which should
16 never be the case when adopting a pet.

17 Also, when adopting, there's a screening process
18 and education process, which is super important.
19 This does not happen at pet stores. It's not right
20 that pet stores are profiting and then small rescues
21 like myself have to clean up the mess. As a city, we
22 must do better. Thank you for considering this bill.

23 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next.

24 ALEXANDREA LAFATA: Good morning, I'm Alexandra
25 LaFata, President of Vegan Muse, garden of lobbyist

1
2 and activist. I have lobbied for many laws in New
3 York, with nearly all them focused on animal welfare
4 alongside Voters for Animal Rights.

5 The size of guinea pigs contributes to the
6 cruelty they endure for reasons that are worth
7 noting. There is a widespread misconception that an
8 animal's body size correlates to its capacity for
9 intelligence, ability to feel emotions & process
10 pain. Though they are tiny, guinea pigs are
11 exceptionally clever, sensitive and aware. Their
12 petite size also means they are specifically marketed
13 by the pet industry as both cute and easy to care
14 for. For somebody who has had guinea pigs, they are
15 cute but they are not quite easy to care for.

16 The small nature of Guinea pigs is exploited by
17 the pet breeding industry to feed a relentless cycle
18 of breeding, marketing and sales. Some are lucky
19 enough to end up in loving homes, but many are
20 abandoned to the wild where they are prey or are
21 surrendered to any already overwhelmed shelter
22 system.

23 The often danced around aspect of pet breeding is
24 the mother herself who isn't often talked about in
25 these hearings. Guinea pig pregnancies are difficult

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2 by nature as babies are born with fur, they are ready
3 to run and they are large compared to their mother.
4 Pregnant guinea pigs can suffer from a prolapsed
5 uterus, hypocalcemia, dystocia, and pregnancy
6 ketosis, which is blood poisoning.

7 If a female guinea pig begins her first pregnancy
8 after she is eight months old, there is a high chance
9 of dystocia, where the bones are fused together, she
10 cannot deliver unaided by humans. The survival rate
11 of cesarian surgeries for guinea pigs is extremely
12 low. Allowing the exploitation of these tiny but
13 sentient animals who already have high risk
14 pregnancies for profit in New York City is
15 unnecessarily cruel, especially when many ultimately
16 have lackluster fates. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, last panelist.

18 CINDY STUTTS: Hello, thank you for having me
19 testify today. My name is Cindy Stutts and I'm the
20 Founder of Bunnies and Beyond.

21 I have said to many people that the animals that
22 end up at animal care centers are the lucky ones.
23 Because we have no idea how many are out there
24 sitting, rotting in cases that parents bought for
25 their kid. The novelty wears off and that animal

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2 just sits there. I've seen guinea pigs and of course
3 rabbits, come in to the shelter with their legs
4 burning off, their bellies the fur is gone. They've
5 been sitting in their own excrement for God knows how
6 long and those are the lucky ones. How many are out
7 there right now as we're sitting here that are slow -
8 dying of slow, painful deaths like from that or
9 starving to death. I've seen that too. I can't tell
10 you how many I've held as they've died in my arms and
11 I couldn't help them because it was too late. So, I
12 know the bans work because it worked with Giuliani's
13 Administration passed it on ferrets and snakes and
14 that and then with the rabbits, it has made a huge
15 difference. And that's all I can say is just please,
16 I hope we can get this passed.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes, and I uhm, I stated
18 earlier that I made a commitment that will get this
19 as soon as we can. There's some processes in the
20 Council but uhm, as soon as we can do it and I've
21 expressed that also to the Speakers office and so, we
22 will do that. That's number one.

23 Number two is that uhm, earlier when ACC and
24 folks were here from DOHMH I talked about us
25 educating kids in the schools because a lot of these

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2 are impulses by kids that just want to have these, I
3 didn't know until you testified just now that they
4 didn't like to be held. I didn't know about that.

5 So, all of this points just more and more to us
6 needing to get this done and we will get it done as
7 quickly as possible and I so appreciate all of you
8 coming here to testify today and for all of the work
9 that you do beyond that. So, thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next panel
11 will be remote and it will be virtual and it will be
12 Herve Breuil from Woodstock Farm Sanctuary, Steven
13 Gruber from Mayor's Alliance for New York City's
14 animals, Elinor Molbegott from the Humane Society of
15 New York, Dr. Ellen Crane from Safe Haven Farm
16 Sanctuary and Elisa Trinidad. Herve Breuil, you may
17 begin when the Sergeant queues you.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry Herve, one second,
20 you're muted. Hold on. Okay, now you may begin.

21 HERVE BREUIL: Okay, thank you. Good morning
22 Chairperson Schulman and good morning honorable
23 Committee Members. My name is Herve Breuil and I am
24 the Shelter Director at Woodstock Farm Sanctuary in
25 High Falls, New York. So, currently we offer

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2 sanctuary and cares for 365 rescued farmed animals. I
3 am here today to testify in support of the Intro 4 to
4 ban the sale of guinea pigs. So, as Shelter Director
5 of the Farm Sanctuary, I can attest that the past
6 couple of years, since the pandemic started there's
7 been an increase of various animals. So, for Farmed
8 animals, for us that would be rabbits, chickens and
9 ducks but also guinea pigs. Since it's people
10 reaching out from New York City, mostly for us and
11 that ask if we can adopt guinea pigs or if we can
12 come pick up guinea pigs that is in public spaces.
13 We do not do that. This is not our mission as a farm
14 sanctuary to rescue guinea pigs and we're not
15 equipped to rescue them and so, we tell those people
16 to contact the animal shelters and ACC of New York
17 City.

18 So, however we do rescue other animals like
19 rabbit, chicken, ducks and I can testify that the
20 issue that we have with animals that the ACC is
21 needed, which notably is a high cost to when
22 associated with the rescue. From spaying and
23 neutering, in the case of rabbits, you also need
24 exotic pets and if you know how expensive that can
25 be. If doing bloodwork, you need to fecal tests and

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2 often some of them need emergency care, which can be
3 expensive. That in abandoned in outside of the park
4 for instance, they may need [INAUDIBLE 1:3635].

5 And one of the other big issue you have when you
6 are rescuing those guinea pigs or those rabbits like
7 we do, is that -

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You could just finish up.
10 Go ahead.

11 HERVE BREUIL: That's it, thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next panelist will be
14 Steven Gruber. You may begin once the Sergeant
15 queues you and our staff will unmute you. Thank you.

16 STEVEN GRUBER: Hi, my name is Steve Gruber. I'm
17 the Director of Communications for the Mayor's
18 Alliance for New York City's animals and I'd like to
19 thank the Council today for the opportunity to speak.
20 I'll be very brief. My colleagues have said most of
21 what I would say in terms of the need for this bill
22 to be passed with the explosion of guinea pigs in the
23 numbers at the New York City shelters. It's clear
24 that the time has come to shut down the influx of
25 guinea pigs coming into the shelters, both for the

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2 benefit of the pigs, the shelters and those who foot
3 the bill for the care of these guinea pigs and with
4 Intro. 4, we have the opportunity to end the
5 proliferation of guinea pigs suffering, dying and
6 ending up in the shelters. The passage of this
7 important bill will go a long way to ease the burden
8 on ACC and other local rescues that take in abandoned
9 guinea pigs and surrendered guinea pigs. When New
10 York City passed the bill in 2014 to stem the tide of
11 rabbits coming into the shelters that was successful
12 in reducing those numbers and so, we have the
13 opportunity now to repeat that same success with
14 guinea pigs. So, the Mayor's Alliance for New York
15 City's animals heartily supports this bill. Thank
16 you.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Elinor Molbegott, you may
19 begin once the Sergeant queues you. Thank you.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 ELINOR MOLBEGOTT: Hi, I'm Elinor Molbegott, I'm
22 an Attorney with the Humane Society of New York.
23 Everything that has already been said, is what I was
24 going to say, so I would say ditto to that. As has
25 been said, the same reasoning that was used to pass

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2 legislation to ban the sale of rabbits from pet
3 stores is applicable to guinea pigs. And so, the
4 same successes would probably happen again, so it's
5 so important that this legislation be passed to
6 protect guinea pigs. And also, to help animal care
7 centers to give them the resources to help the many
8 thousands of animals that need their attention and
9 there's limited resources.

10 We've already heard how it is difficult to place
11 so many guinea pigs in homes, particular as they
12 continue to be sold in pet shops, some have been
13 abandoned. While they're inexpensive to purchase,
14 they're expensive to care for, particularly
15 veterinary care. And the bottom line really is that
16 there's an over conservation fee that really need to
17 be addressed and the sale of guinea pigs at pet shops
18 just exacerbates the problem that we already know
19 exists for humane legislation that will not only help
20 you curtail the influx of guinea pigs at shelter and
21 the abandonment of guinea pigs in our streets and
22 parks but it will allow ACC to use its limited
23 resources to help the many other animals that need
24 its help.

1
2 So, the Humane Society of New York sincerely
3 hopes that Council will pass this legislation and
4 thank our colleagues for all of the efforts to help
5 get it passed. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much and as
7 I've said earlier that we're looking at sometime
8 during the first quarter of the year I'm hoping to
9 get this passed, so thank you very much.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Dr. Ellen Crane, you may
11 begin after the Sergeant queues you.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

13 ELISA CRANE: Hello everyone. Thank you all for
14 the opportunity to be here, for leading and
15 protecting animals and for your work in serving our
16 city -

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry to interrupt you. Is
18 this Elisa or? Yeah, sorry, Dr. Ellen Crane, you
19 will be testifying next. We're just unmuting her
20 right now. Thank you. Sorry Dr. Crane, you may
21 begin. Ellen Crane, are you here? You may begin.
22 Sorry, I think we're having some audio issues. We're
23 going to move to our next panelist and we'll come
24 back to you. Thank you.

1
2 Ellen Crane, sorry, we're having some audio
3 issues. If you'd like to try calling through your
4 phone, that might make it easier. We're going to
5 move to our next panelist.

6 ELLEN CRANE: Yeah, no, yeah, I did.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, we can hear you now,
8 sorry. Apologies Crane, we'll come back to you.
9 We're going to go to Elisa Trinidad.

10 ELISA TRINIDAD: Surrendered and abandoned
11 animals during this pandemic has put a lot of stress
12 on the shelters and depleted resources. But what is
13 not seen is the stress on organizations like mine
14 that provide services and support to our communities.
15 Taking care of an animal companion is already
16 challenging and expensive and taking care of animals
17 on a large scale is even more so. It requires an
18 enormous amount of time, money, care and incredible
19 attention to each individual. If this pandemic has
20 taught us anything about how we need to operate in
21 our city and at large is that we cannot continue to
22 operate for an emergency and crisis perspective.
23 That we must assign policies that are preventative
24 and protect the lives of animals, workers and
25 volunteers and what we have now is an emergency. We

1
2 must ban the sale of guinea pigs and encourage
3 adoption from organizations that can offer New
4 Yorkers support in education, like New York animal
5 care centers.

6 If passed, this bill will take the burden of
7 animal shelters and all the organizations working to
8 provide support to New Yorkers. Please consider the
9 passing of this bill, a step towards that. Thank you
10 for your time.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Elisa. We're
12 having some audio difficulties right now. Uhm, we're
13 going to take a five-minute break. Nope, we're good?
14 Okay, we are good. Apologies everyone.

15 Our next witness will be Ellen Crane. You may
16 begin when the Sergeant queues you.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has begun.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ellen Crane, I apologize, are
19 you - there you go.

20 ELLEN CRANE: Hi, I'm sorry, I don't know what -
21 I'm actually in a veterinary office with a bunny that
22 we rescued. I'm from - I'm one of the cofounders
23 with my husband of Safe Haven Farm Sanctuary in
24 Poquott New York and we have gotten a tremendous
25 number of requests for taking especially small

1

2 animals that were bought in the city to entertain
3 children while they were home. And now, the family
4 is tired of the animal and they often use those
5 terms.

6 So, I want to support strenuously the passage of
7 this [LOST AUDIO 1:45:16]

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry, you were muted. We're
9 going to unmute you. Please accept the prompt that
10 says to unmute you. Sorry Dr. Crane, we're having
11 some audio issues it seems. The Zoom should be
12 prompting you to unmute to accept the unmute. We're
13 going to take a five-minute break just to figure out
14 what's going on. Thank you every one for your
15 patience.

16 BREAK [1:46:15-1:46:23].

17 I apologize now, we are resuming. Yes, we can
18 hear you now or no, we can't. 1:46:31-1:46:52
19 Apologies, we are taking a five-minute break to
20 figure this out. Thank you for your patience.

21 BREAK [1:46:56-1:48:08] Hi everyone, can you
22 please seat, we're going to resume? We are going to
23 move on and we will come back to Dr. Crane.
24 Apologies for the audio issues. As a reminder, you
25 can submit written testimony to

1
2 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, apologies, we will
3 try once again. In the meantime, we're going to move
4 to our next panel, which will be in-person and it
5 will be Elana Natale from VFAR, Joyce Friedman,
6 Margaret Lee, Jessica Hollander and Cindy Nunez Del
7 Arco.

8 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Whenever you're ready to
9 start, go ahead.

10 ELENA NATALE: Thank you. My name is Elena
11 Natale. I am a member of the leadership team at
12 Voters for Animal Rights and a resident of District
13 40 in Brooklyn. Thank you to Speaker Adams,
14 Chairperson Schulman and the Committee on Health for
15 this opportunity to testify in strong support of
16 Intro. 4. I'd also like to thank Deputy Speaker
17 Ayala for her leadership on this issue, as well as
18 the 34 Council Member who have co-sponsored the
19 legislation, including my representative Council
20 Member Rita Joseph.

21 Before coming into the city today, I did my
22 morning routine with my cat Dusty, whom I adopted
23 five years ago. I fed him, gave him his medicine,
24 gave him fresh water and I scratched his chin and
25 watched as his eyes soften and he prepared to settle

1
2 in for his first of several naps he'll take
3 throughout the day. I did the same with Freddy, a
4 kitty whom we rescued from the street over the summer
5 and though it is taken him a bit of time to warm up
6 to chin scratches, he's been happily napping in doors
7 since day one. I left Brooklyn feeling so grateful
8 that Dusty and Freddy are safe and loved. But the
9 images of them resting, warm comfortable and safe are
10 just opposed with images of animals in need. My
11 social media feeds are a seemingly never scroll of
12 desperate pleas from our city's overrun shelters and
13 independent rescuers searching for fosters and
14 adopters.

15 We do the best that we can to help so often
16 stretching beyond our limits. The care and the
17 concern are infinite but sadly the resources, the
18 space, the money and the time are not. And with
19 every animal purchased in a pet store, the situation
20 worsens. The rescuers become more overwhelmed and
21 the number of animals whom we can't help gets higher
22 and higher.

23 But passing Intro. 4 can help significantly. By
24 banning the sale of guinea pigs in pet stores, we can
25 help countless animals in need. The guinea pigs who

1

2 are bred for sale in deplorable conditions, all too
3 often to be abandoned and neglected, as well as cats,
4 dogs and rabbits who could be better helped by
5 rescues if they weren't so overtasked by the number
6 of the guinea pigs who are surrendered to them daily.

7

8 To help all the animals in our shelter system as
9 well as the people who work so hard to care for them,
10 I ask that you please support Intro. 4. Thank you.

11

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, next.

12

13 JOYCE FRIEDMAN: Thank you for this opportunity
14 to testify on behalf of Voters for Animal Rights in
15 favor of Intro. 4. My name is Joyce Friedman and I
16 am on the Board of Directors of VFAR. I'm a former
17 social worker and a long-term animal advocate. I
18 live in District 29 in Forest Hills and I give a
19 particular thank you to my Council Member and
20 Committee Chair Schulman for holding this hearing.

21

22 Passing this bill will not only stop animal
23 suffering but will also support two groups of people.
24 Those who work and volunteer in the animal sheltering
25 profession and pet owners. The selling of
unsterilized guinea pigs in pet stores while ACC had
taken over 750 surrendered guinea pigs this year is
directly contributing to the over population of these

1
2 animals at ACC with no end in sight. This astounding
3 number of 750 doesn't include abandoned guinea pigs
4 in parks, etc.

5 ACC's hardworking staff, volunteers, and those at
6 partner rescue groups desperately need relief from
7 this solvable problem. Stopping these unnecessary
8 sales will hold the surrender cycle and
9 simultaneously bring more people to ACC to adopt from
10 their huge population of guinea pigs instead of
11 purchasing them at stores, only to often give them up
12 as we've heard so much today.

13 There are also many well-meaning pet lovers who
14 impulse buy guinea pigs, lured by stores who often
15 sell a guinea pig case with two free guinea pigs or
16 via a similar sales tactic, which presents these
17 animals as inanimate objects without long term needs.
18 Pet stores also will sell unsterilized pairs of males
19 and females, which leads to painful surrenders of
20 these beloved family pets by well-meaning families
21 with no animal care education given to them.

22 On the contrary, all the support and education is
23 given to them when they adopt from shelters and
24 rescues and unsterilized pairs are not adopted out.
25 When the sale of rabbits was banned in 2014 by this

1
2 New York Council, the surrender of rabbits dropped to
3 ACC. Intro. 4 is a commonsense bill, which will help
4 guinea pigs in the same way and as well, help our
5 city's animal shelter and rescue heroes and pet
6 owners. Thank you so much to Council Member Ayala,
7 the other bill sponsors and to Speaker Adams for
8 holding this hearing. Thank you so much.

9 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Next, go ahead.

10 MARGARET LEE: Oh, thank you. My name is
11 Margaret Lee. I'm an Animal Advocate resident of New
12 York City and I'm here today for guinea pigs in
13 support of Intro. 4 prohibiting the sale of guinea
14 pigs as pets. The passage of the crucial bill will
15 result in our becoming a more compassionate
16 community. Guinea pigs are misunderstood in so many
17 ways. Their dorsal sensitive nature has led them to
18 be inappropriately viewed as ideal starter pets for
19 children. With both parents and children not
20 realizing the complexity, commitment, and cost of
21 their care.

22 Often bought on a whim from pet stores, as we've
23 heard so often today, when the challenge of their
24 upkeep emerge, they routinely end up being abandoned
25 in parks where their chance of survival is zero and

1
2 where they're faded to endure a torturous death of
3 starvation, thirst, freezing and predation.

4 They are also frequent victims of cruelty, with
5 the crimes against them largely unseen, unreported,
6 uncared about. Often times too, they're left at
7 already overwhelmed adoption centers where their
8 chance of adoption is sadly slim. Given their
9 sensitivity and vulnerability, even in diligently
10 caring homes, there are many problems associated with
11 their care. Meeting the guinea pigs nutritional
12 requirements, maintaining favorable temperatures, low
13 household noise levels, constant supply of timothy
14 hay, daily cage cleaning, regular vet visits for nail
15 trimmings. These are just a few of the demands a
16 family would have to meet to adequately care their
17 sensitive high maintenance creatures. Sadly, even
18 before reaching a home, pet stores themselves fail to
19 meet these bare minimum requirements with extreme
20 negligence and abusiveness being pervasive.

21 Guinea pigs are prone to respiratory ailments
22 including difficult to treat pneumonia. These
23 conditions require costly veterinary care plus
24 careful administration of medications. Such
25 treatment is not addressed in pet stores and when

1
2 bought by families, the unexpected cost is often what
3 leads to park abandonment or critically overwhelmed
4 adoption centers.

5 As a prey species, guinea pigs startle easily.
6 Given to erratic movements that frequently lead to
7 traumatic death due to children suddenly dropping
8 their fragile pet. Just recently when speaking to a
9 friend about the urgency of Intro. 4, she told me she
10 is still very much haunted by the death of the guinea
11 pig she accidentally dropped as a child. When both she
12 and her pet were suddenly frightened. It is critical
13 New York City pave a path of compassion by passing
14 Intro. 4. It will not only protect guinea pigs from
15 routine neglect, inadvertent mishandling or
16 deliberate cruelty, it will also spare well-meaning
17 New Yorkers and their children decades of guilt from
18 inevitable mishaps.

19 In short, a lot of unhappiness can be avoided by
20 passage of Intro. 4. Please let's get this done.
21 Thank you.

22 JESSICA HOLLANDER: My name is Jessica Hollander
23 and I am a Brooklyn resident, business owner and a
24 volunteer with Voters for Animal Rights. I'm here to
25 testify in favor of Intro. 4 and I'd like thank

1
2 Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala for introducing the
3 legislation, as well as Speaker Adams and Chairperson
4 Schulman for holding this hearing.

5 I personally do not know a lot about guinea pigs
6 specifically, so just more broadly, I want to say
7 that the idea of buying and selling animals of any
8 species has never sat right with me. I do believe
9 that there will come a time when humanity looks back
10 on the breeding and trade of other species as
11 fundamentally unethical. For a litany of reasons but
12 primarily because where there is money involved,
13 there is invariably abuse and exploitation and in
14 this case, abandonment and neglect.

15 I am continually in awe of animal care centers
16 and the tireless network of animal rescuers
17 throughout New York City and I do think that it's
18 time the government aided them by protecting future
19 animals from being purchased and then abused or
20 abandoned.

21 So, I ask the Council to please vote yes on the
22 bill to ban the sale of guinea pigs and to take this
23 one small step in the direction of thoughtful
24 stewardship of the very valuable lives of other
25 species and in this case, vulnerable guinea pigs.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, next.

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CINDY NUNEZ DEL ARCO: Hello, my name is Cindy
and I'm here to support Voters for Animal Rights.

5

Whether animals are conscious and aware is a question

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many of us have caught ourselves thinking at some

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point or another.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Just pull the microphone a
little bit, yeah.

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CINDY NUNEZ DEL ARCO: So, I invite you to think
about the conscious experience of someone close to
you and answer this yourself. You may think this is
a radical thought, then why is it that researchers
have spent countless of hours and resources to study
animal behavior, in particular that of rodents?

Because rodents such as prairie voles and guinea pigs
can tell us how we love, how we care for our mates
and our children, how we experience safety, fear,
loneliness, and so many other emotional states.

20

When prairie voles bond, they do so for life.

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The male alongside the female raise their young
together and when separation or death occurs, their
stress systems and hormones like vasopressin which
regulates blood pressure increase in density. They
retreat and show increased anxiety in laboratory

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2 tests. Under somewhat different circumstances, a
3 1986 study followed 12 guinea pigs placed in long-
4 term isolation, they'll probably know how that feels
5 like. Among their many symptoms were high levels of
6 the stress hormone cortisol, severe loss of more than
7 20 percent their body weight, and death. Out of the
8 12, only 5 survived, who gained low ranking social
9 positions and were unable to reproduce.

10 These may be small beings, but they are conscious
11 beings. Which we ship in stacked bins and small
12 cages to pet suppliers under extreme conditions and
13 when they don't arrive frozen or dead after that
14 traumatic transit, we display in storefronts,
15 releasing them to people under a quick transaction,
16 which serves to fund this cycle of harm and torture.

17 In the reverberating words of American Ecologist
18 Carl Safina: "Animals have the same imperatives as we
19 have: stay alive, keep our babies alive, and let life
20 continue." And for this, I would like to invite you
21 to support Intro. 4. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much and I
23 also want to give a shout out to my constituent Joyce
24 Friedman who keeps me honest. And it's not always
25 easy being an elected official but please know that I

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2 care very deeply for our animals, so thank you all
3 very much.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will now try
again to go to remote panel. I'm just going to
remind everyone that a member of our staff will be
unmuting you and please accept the prompt that comes
up in order to be unmuted and then the Sergeant will
queue you before you may begin.

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The next panel will be Ellen Crane, Barbara
Dennihiy, Kathy Nizzari, Mike Bober and Nathan Semmel.
Ellen Crane, you may begin once the Sergeant queues
you.

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We're going to move to the next, Barbara Dennihiy,
if you are ready you may begin once the Sergeant
queues you.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Nope, is Barbara, Barbara are
you on Zoom? Alright, we'll move to the next. Kathy
Nizzari, you may begin after the Sergeant queues you
and we unmute you. Thank you.

22

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

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KATHY NIZZARI: Good afternoon Chairwoman
Schulman and members of the Health Committee. I'm
Kathy Nizzari, Founder and Chair of the Lights Out

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2 Coalition, and I thank you for the opportunity to
3 present testimony written by our member Jessica
4 Zafonte, Founder of They All Want To Live, animal
5 rescuer and rehabilitator, and member of the New York
6 Bar Association's Animal Law Committee.

7 We fully support Intro. 4 and thank Councilwoman
8 Ayala for this important legislation. The purchase
9 and subsequent disposal of companion animals is a
10 widespread issue that has far reaching negative
11 effects. Many do not survive the ordeal. A recent
12 Times article noted the uptick in procurement and
13 surrender of animals during COVID. Folks who
14 purchased pets during lockdown did not make a
15 lifetime commitment to these animals, but merely
16 sought companionship during a time of temporary
17 isolation.

18 Afterwards, guinea pigs were surrendered at a
19 much higher rate. Because they do not behave like
20 cats or dogs, people simply don't feel as guilty
21 giving them away. It could not be easier or cheaper
22 to purchase small animals like guinea pigs from pet
23 stores. They are cute and small and are purchased
24 constantly for kids without a second thought to their
25 long-term care or needs. Rather than investing

1
2 precious few minutes in educating themselves, which
3 would make a world of difference to the animal,
4 people make the rash choice of abandoning their
5 impulse purchases. Also, guinea pigs are purchased
6 in pairs. Since no neuter mandate exists for them,
7 they quickly reproduce and are then surrendered or
8 abandoned, many of whom are pregnant or just had
9 babies.

10 New York's Animal Care Center which keeps them in
11 stacked trays for the duration of their short, sad
12 lives reported 769 guinea pigs relinquished to them
13 so far this year alone, more than double pre-pandemic
14 levels. Most people just abandon them nonstop in
15 city parks, in buildings, give them to Craigs List or
16 even leave them out with the trash. Guinea pigs
17 don't and can't, live in the wild here, but they are
18 regularly dumped illegally. Most will die of the
19 elements, starvation, or predation before any rescuer
20 even knew they had been abandoned. The problem is so
21 much more prevalent than people realize—

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 KATHY NIZZARI: And it is only getting worse. We
24 must end the sale of guinea pigs. There is no
25 downside. Guinea pigs can be adopted from ACC and

1
2 from other rescue groups across the city. Therefore,
3 we urge you to please pass Intro 4. We are
4 submitting a more in-depth testimony electronically
5 and thank you for your time.

6 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. I
7 also just want to question people. We'll let you
8 finish if you're over the two minutes, we're not
9 going to interrupt you but we have a lot of folks
10 testifying today and we really want to give people
11 the opportunity. So, to the extent that you can do
12 that, it's great. You can always submit testimony
13 because we have to pull it all together anyway. So,
14 thank you very much.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next panelist will be
16 Mike Bober from Pet Advocacy Network. Please accept
17 the prompt to be unmuted and wait until the Sergeant
18 queues you. Thank you.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 MIKE BOBER: Good afternoon. My name is Mike
21 Bober and I'm the President of the Pet Advocacy
22 Network. I'm actually here representing a voice that
23 thus far has been absent in the conversation. Which
24 is that of New York Pet retailers. We are concerned
25 about this and obviously because this brings

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2 something to pet shops, that we think is wholly
3 unnecessary. And that is an air of antagonism and a
4 mindset that pet shops are somehow culprits in need
5 of punishment rather than partners in pet care.

6 We're here today to say that it's not the case.
7 We share the concerns that all of the previous
8 speakers have had about the lack of education and the
9 need for better approaches to make sure that the
10 animals that are going into people's homes,
11 specifically guinea pigs in this case are as well
12 cared for and as well treated as we know they deserve
13 to be.

14 We want to work with the city on this. We
15 appreciate the hard work of animal care. We
16 appreciate the influx, the numbers that have gone up
17 in the past years. We would however point out that
18 sales numbers indicate that sales are actually going
19 down. The numbers that came through in 2020, and in
20 early 2021, have tapered off. And what you will see
21 as a result, is there is likely to be a commensurate
22 drop off in the number of abandonments as well.

23 Our concern is that this a solution to a problem
24 that lagging the data that's out there and for what
25 it's worth, the other concern that we've got is that

1
2 we keep hearing that the ban on the sale of rabbits
3 was a success. I'm looking at intake numbers for
4 2021 and 2022 that indicate that 350 plus rabbits
5 were surrendered in 2021 and almost 400 have been
6 surrendered so far this year.

7 Our concern is again that this is a solution that
8 does not appropriately address the concern that's
9 been raised. We want to be partners. We want to
10 help. We want to work with the city to increase -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

12 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: It's fine, just finish
13 your thought.

14 MIKE BOBER: And we do appreciate everything that
15 you are doing on this issue. We want to work with
16 you. We do not believe that we should be held out as
17 opponents in need of bringing in but rather as
18 partners in pet care.

19 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So, I have a question for
20 you sir. Do you know where the guinea pigs are
21 coming from that go to the pet stores? Like where
22 are they coming in from?

23 MIKE BOBER: Absolutely, pet stores are required
24 to source mammals from USDA licensed and regulated
25 breeders.

1

2 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you very much
3 and for your testimony.

4 MIKE BOBER: Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We'll now move to Nathan
6 Semmel. Please wait until – please accept the prompt
7 to be unmuted and then wait until the Sergeant queues
8 you. Thank you.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

10 NATHAN SEMMEL: Good afternoon, my name is Nathan
11 Semmel, I am a member of the Leadership Team at
12 Voters for Animal Rights and a District 7 resident
13 here in Manhattan.

14 In 1974, I was four years old when my parents
15 surprised me with a guinea pig they bought from a
16 Manhattan pet store. I named him Tiger after the
17 character in Winnie the Pooh. Tiger was the first of
18 many animals in my life and I adored him. Tiger was
19 also the last animal we ever bought. Unfortunately,
20 my parents learned that guinea pigs like cats, dogs
21 and rabbits, are available for adoption at animal
22 shelters and that buying them from pet stores only
23 perpetuates breeding, including from awful commercial
24 breeding mills. They passed that lesson on to me and
25 why buy from a pet store when there is an opportunity

1
2 to help overburdened shelters and rescues and still
3 be able to come home with an adorable companion.
4 Now, perhaps there wasn't a need for legislation such
5 as Intro. 4 in 1974 but there is now.

6 2020 changed everything. Countless people made
7 impulse purchases or innocently went to pet stores
8 seeking companionship due to the pandemic. As you've
9 heard, when those people could no longer care for the
10 guinea pigs or because they went back to work or
11 because their financial situation is turned, they
12 surrendered or dumped them and it has not stopped.

13 I trust the experts on that and it has become
14 unsustainable for our city's animal shelters and
15 rescues and unmanageable for their mostly volunteer
16 staffs. So, here I am 48 years later asking this
17 Council to prohibit the sale of guinea pigs in pet
18 stores. While times have changed, our affection for
19 guinea pigs has not but we can't continue as is. So,
20 thank you Deputy Speaker Ayala and Chairperson
21 Schulman and the numerous co-sponsors of Intro. 4,
22 including my representative Shaun Abreu. This is
23 commonsense and proven legislation. It is effective,
24 humane and it will make the lives of guinea pigs,
25

1
2 other shelter animals and shelter employees so much
3 better. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you for your
5 testimony.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We'll now move back to in-
7 person panel. The next panel will be, Gwen Kaiser
8 from Reenies Rabbit Rescue, Donna Coles from
9 Greenwich House OAC, Angela Connell from Puppy Kitty
10 New York City and Vivian Barna from All About Rabbits
11 Rescue and Loretta Wilson.

12 You may begin when you are ready. Thank you.

13 GWEN KAISER: Okay, hey, so my name is Gwen. I
14 helped found Reenies Rabbit Rescue and we've been
15 around for almost a decade. We take in rabbits but
16 have been forced to take in guinea pigs and also
17 feral cats as a result of the overwhelming demand.

18 I have like a lot of notes but I know there's a
19 little amount of time and I don't want to bore -

20 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You can always submit that
21 too. You can write them up and you have - she has
22 how much time?

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You can submit up to 72 hours
24 after this hearing.

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GWEN KAISER: Okay, thank you. Thank you. I won't bore with echoing the sentiments, facts, and uhm, well whatever the word is of everybody that's gone before me. I've not disagreed with a single statement. They're all right.

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I'll tell you quickly the most recent - I'm responsible for the guinea pigs in my care because nobody else wants to take care of them. They are the most difficult. Rabbits are easier, cats are easier. Nobody wants to take care of the guinea pigs. They are so messy. They are - you got to clean their water constantly. They're just a lot of work, so I end up taking care of the guinea pigs for the most part.

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Most recently we were contacted by a landlord, oh, our tenant left behind a box of eight in the apartment. So, we took them. Actually, they contacted another rescue and the rescue contacted us. Look, I'm so overwhelmed, can you help? So, we were like sure. They were in our geographical location anyway.

23

24

25

So, one of them was so pregnant, I mean, I have a photo I can show you. Her head is like that and her body is like that. I don't even - it's physically

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2 impossible looking but uhm, so we're waiting to see
3 if we do have to do a cesarean on her. The other one
4 we just recently took; I actually was crying. It was
5 so upsetting to me, which I've never done. This poor
6 lady, a poor teenager got kicked out of her house by
7 her parents. I mean, I don't know the back story and
8 she had purchased this adorable little guinea pig as
9 a therapy pet and she was so devastated. The
10 homeless shelter wouldn't let her take it and so, you
11 know, like us animal rescuers were driven like
12 unexplainably, inexplicably. I will never stop and
13 it's not pleasant but I'm going to force myself to do
14 it. And it's for the animals but it's also for the
15 people. Like, this poor woman, she was so relieved,
16 she called constantly, "Do you still have my guinea
17 pig?" "Can you hold him for me?" I said, fine,
18 we'll hold him for you until you get back on your
19 feet.

20 And like, that support for that woman, she's
21 going to be one like down the road, she's going to be
22 one of those people that's not going to have to tell
23 people about a terrible sob story about her pet.
24 She's actually going to have a nice story to tell
25 people how the rescue held up for her and gave it

1

2 back. So, that's something that's never mentioned is
3 the emotional toll on humans. And of course, the
4 financial aspect as well, the taxpayer dollars. You
5 know us rescuers, we pick up the slack. We don't get
6 a penny from anybody. I have to go out there with a
7 can and raise every dollar we get and I literally do
8 that sometimes.

9 So, it also helps with the taxpayer dollars and
10 it eliminates the burden on shelters because most
11 shelters do not even take guinea pigs let alone
12 rabbits. And sometimes they don't take cats. So,
13 and that's government allocation of funds.

14 But I'm going to just cut to the chase to answer
15 the pet shop person. I forgot his name, I'm sorry.
16 Now, I would like to directly respond to him. I have
17 tried many times to work with pet stores. I have
18 written them letters. I have written Petco and Pet
19 Smart letters. They send me back a form letter.
20 They don't even have the courtesy to answer my
21 questions or call me. They don't care.

22 Also, there's a local pet store, it's a mom and
23 pop one, I went in there, this was last year and I
24 asked him to please give the animals hay. There was
25 no hay for the guinea pigs and the rabbits. Do you

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2 know he called the cops on me to get me removed from
3 the store. This is what we're dealing with when you
4 deal with pet stores. You can't, you can't, it's
5 like they're a brick wall.

6

7 There is one gentleman that runs a pet store near
8 me. Pet Supplies Plus, it's similar to Petco and Pet
9 Smart but it's franchised. The parent company is a
10 hedge fund company, so they have tons of money but
11 they are a franchise so they like to promote that
12 they're locally owned, which is sort of true. So, I
13 have a pretty good relationship with him. He donates
14 us cat food to help with the feral cats and uhm, they
15 do not sell rabbits, but they do insist upon selling
16 guinea pigs. And whenever I get a guinea pig, I go
17 over and I say hey, we just got another guinea pig
18 from you.

18

19 Oh, that's a shame, why is it happening? Well,
20 it's happening because people think you know they're
21 easy and then they're not and can you take them back?

21

22 Oh, sure, I'll take them back. Okay, I'll have
23 people start calling him instead. Well, I did. They
24 call us. We get daily calls with guinea pigs.

24

25 Forget about rabbits and cats, just guinea pigs. So,
I've started having them call him and he said, no,

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2 I'm not going to take them back. So, I have to go
3 back to them many, many time. Hey, you said you'd
4 take them back and now you're not. Oh, oh, uhm,
5 yeah, no, tell them to keep calling us. And this is
6 has gone on like for months. And so, in rebuttal to
7 that gentleman from the pet stores okay, I've tried
8 working with you. It doesn't work.

9 Now, if we were to pass a law and we were to come
10 up with an arrangement that would allow the pet
11 stores to continue selling guinea pigs with some sort
12 of oversight, then you have to worry about enforcing
13 the law, which is a whole other ball of wax. You got
14 to hire somebody who's not going to be paid off, who
15 actually cares and is going to go around and work
16 with these pet stores.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I appreciate it. No, I
18 appreciate that uhm, the bill has a lot of sponsors
19 so I'm not worried about that and thank you for, you
20 can submit whatever you want in terms of the
21 testimony because we put it all on the record. So,
22 thank you.

23 GWEN KAISER: Okay, yeah.

24 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you.

25 GWEN KAISER: Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Next.

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VIVIAN BARNA: Hi, Vivian Barna and I'm the
Founder and Director of Rabbits Rescue.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry, can you turn your mic
on.

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VIVIAN BARNA: Sorry, do I get an extra couple of
seconds? Okay, Vivian Barna, Founder of All About
Rabbits Rescue based in Forest Hills Queens. I think
that's your district, right? We've adopted out
nearly 600 rabbits. We've prevented many rabbits
from being turned into ACC whenever possible. I
answer my phone just about 24/7. We take in strays
from the five boroughs and also Nassau and Suffolk
County. I want to express my gratefulness for the
open admissions policy here in New York City and I
maybe want to correct and say, that you know ACC is
probably the only open admission policy shelter in
Long Island too, or even the whole state practically.

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In my opinion, pet shops operate on the basis of
omission and misinformation to conduct their small
animal sales, including guinea pigs. I have no love
for pet shops. There's no way a pet shop can
properly transmit all the information that's needed

1
2 for a guinea pig sale or small animals, parrots, etc.
3 They're all a lot of work.

4 I'd like to know how this pet advocate, pet
5 advocacy, pet shop guy, whatever he was, what he's
6 offering. What has he done to work with the City of
7 New York? I've gone to Petco's; they don't even know
8 what Petfinder is. I went to the Forest Hills Petco;
9 they don't know what Petfinder is. They couldn't
10 have given a hoot about passing information to me on
11 rabbits the people want to surrender. All these
12 Petco's and Pet Smarts, they all get these phone
13 calls. Where can I buy a rabbit? Where can I
14 surrender a rabbit?

15 I actually did speak higher up's of Petco years
16 ago; they were not interested in making a referral
17 system from the pet stores to rescues. Not
18 interested. So, again, I have no sympathy for Petco
19 or Pet Smart if we reduce their profits from guinea
20 pigs. I'm not going to shed a tear at all.

21 There was a question about the cost of guinea
22 pigs, I can tell rabbits cost about \$3.00 a day, not
23 including vet care. So, a guinea pig is probably
24 about the same, maybe a little bit less. You folks
25 brought up education, like community education in the

1
2 classrooms. It's the parents that are making these
3 crazy decisions and allowing their kids to you know
4 rule them. You know parents are not taking you know
5 control. So, I think education has to be geared to
6 parents and teachers. We get calls from teachers who
7 want a classroom rabbit pet or a classroom guinea pig
8 pet. So, I think that you know there's a lot of
9 force behind New York City government and ACC to let
10 the pet shops know that we're not going to support
11 you, you know if you're going to sell guinea pigs or
12 you need to refer people to, why can't they refer you
13 know potential adopters or even surrenders.

14 I'm also confused a little bit. I know that with
15 the rabbit ban, it didn't address breeders. Breeders
16 have stepped up. Breeders are a big underground
17 economy, especially in New Jersey and they have
18 stepped up and I think that why the numbers of
19 rabbits coming in last year and this year or
20 whatever, has not really gone down. I get a call
21 from a lot of people that purchase breeders, Long
22 Island and New Jersey.

23 I don't know if this guinea pig bill addresses
24 breeders.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No because we don't have authority over that. The Council doesn't. So, uhm, yeah, if you could just wrap up please and then submit whatever you want.

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VIVIAN BARNA: I wrapped up and I appreciate you all being here and thank you so much.

8

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: And thank you.

9

ANGELA CONNELL: Hello, my name is Angela

10

Connell, thank you for allowing me to speak today. I

11

am an individual animal rescuer for over 20 years.

12

I'm also a rescuer for the nonprofit organization

13

Puppy Kitty New York City. As a rescuer, I've seen

14

it all but the guinea pig crisis is one of the worst.

15

From guinea pigs in homes and deplorable conditions

16

in parks and on the side of the road dumped and

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discarded, this is mainly due to impulsive buyers who

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primarily purchase for children. I was one of those

19

moms back in 1999 who purchased one in a pet store

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for my child. I was in my early 20's back then, not

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knowing what I know now. I was not educated at the

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pet store or given any direction. My daughter

23

dropped a guinea pig a few months later, her leg was

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broken and she had to be euthanized.

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I could not afford the vet bill at that time, I was only a child and I believe once the leg is broken, it is not easy to repair. In my opinion, this is not a pet for a child and we have to live with that guilt to this very day and the trauma it caused to my child as well, who still brings it up as an adult.

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They are often neglected and abused, housed in cramped up, tiny cages on a dresser in the bedroom and then discarded when the desire has worn off. Also, the vet bills for injury or illness is not affordable and exotic vets are minimal and then the vet shortage as well. Pet stores sell them to anyone, no home checks, no references, just \$50 and you get to walk away with a small pet for your child that is anything but smaller, inexpensive or less to care for. In fact, they are not easy to care for properly. Being on the frontline and in the streets and dealing with owner surrender as well, this is a serious crisis. But with the option to buy in pet stores, we are not getting anywhere.

23

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25

On May 5th, Megan and I from Puppy Kitty, rescued eight guinea pigs on the surface road of the Long Island Expressway, which is a known dumping ground

1
2 for guinea pigs and many more since that time we've
3 rescued.

4 So, I thank you for considering Intro. 4 to ban
5 the sale of guinea pigs and I fully support this
6 bill.

7 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I want to thank you all
8 for your passion and commitment to our animals.
9 Where on the Long Island Expressway, Long Island
10 Expressway and where?

11 ANGELA CONNELL: Actually, it's on the border of
12 Mass Fifth and Elmhurst. Yeah, so it's on the side
13 and there's like this grassy, bushy area and I know
14 that on that particular day ten were found but
15 someone had rescued a couple of them prior to that
16 and we don't know if we got them all.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: If you get a better
18 location and you can give it to the Committee, we can
19 -

20 ANGELA CONNELL: Absolutely.

21 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Contact the local Council
22 Member there to look into that with their precinct.
23 Okay?

24 ANGELA CONNELL: Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I just wanted to check to see if Donna Coles or Loretta Wilson were here and would like to testify? You were supposed to be on this panel. No, we will move to our last in-person panel and then we will move to remote but this in-person panel will be Suriya Khan(SP?), Natasha Reznik, Pilar Amaya, and Nina Bregenzer(SP?), Roxanne Delgado, I believe you were registered to testify in person but then requested remote. We will keep a look out for Zoom to see if you log on and then we will include you on a remote panel. Thank you. You may begin when ready.

SURIYA KHAN: Hi, uhm, this is for not only guinea pigs, this is for all animal legislation. My name is Suriya Khan and I currently work on the development team for an organization of Brooklyn called Refoundry, which helps formally incarcerated individuals meet training and education goals so they can acquire achievable work skills. I'm here today first of all to say thank you to the Council to addressing this issue.

While on the surface, many may think it's just a guinea pig. Quite profoundly this is about so much more. This is about benevolence. The term

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2 compassion gets thrown around a lot today but to
3 truly embody the meaning of living a compassionate
4 existence, one must walk with a compassionate heart,
5 listen with a compassionate ear and view the world
6 through a compassionate eye. For many, it takes
7 discipline and usually a shifting of one's own
8 perspectives. Now, I currently don't think it's
9 really feasible to cut all ties with all harmful
10 industries as the chains of cause and effect in our
11 modern world are just too complex, but I do think
12 it's possible for society to find new ways to adjust
13 existing practices and actively pursue ways that
14 inflict less harm on this planet and within the
15 animal kingdom. There is momentum to doing the right
16 thing legislatively on a local and state level,
17 nationally and globally. We can all certainly agree
18 that our treatment of animals included within factory
19 farms and station practices have affected us almost
20 to catastrophic levels.

21 Senator Cory Booker, someone who I admire mostly,
22 I really look at him as one legislator who is leading
23 the charge on animal welfare reform. We need more of
24 him.

25

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2 I conclude by saying this, how do we wish to
3 leave this earth when we pass and when we die?
4 Because at the end, there's only one thing that will
5 truly matter. Not your bank account, not your status
6 and not your title or position. Did you move through
7 life inflicting harm or did you actively create space
8 for kindness and love towards your fellow man and all
9 living creatures. Thank you for your time today and
10 please, please pass Intro. 4.

11 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Go ahead,
12 next.

13 PILAR AMAYA: Hi, I'm Pilar Amaya. I'm a
14 Wildlife Rehabilitator. I've been a rehabber since
15 2019 and I deal with rescuers from all five boroughs
16 all over the city. I normally stick to just rodents,
17 squirrels specifically but the one non-rodent call I
18 get all the time, it's guinea pigs. They're running
19 around. They can't catch them. They need to borrow
20 a trap. It's going to get cold. They're going to
21 die, blah, blah, blah.

22 So, that's why I'm here because a lot of my time
23 was spent the last year trying to help guinea pigs
24 and it's time that I don't have. I rescued over 300
25 squirrels last year alone and I just as a wildlife

1
2 rehabber, I don't have time to help with guinea pigs
3 but they need so much help right now.

4 I was going to talk about how guinea pigs make
5 horrible pets but I think everybody already touched
6 upon that. I don't think they should be pets at all.
7 They're very shy animals. Children should not be
8 holding them. They should not be in classrooms. I
9 don't let people hold my Chikwawa that's six pounds.
10 I've had people drop him inappropriately.

11 These are animals that are, they're very afraid
12 of people. I think obviously as we all know, guinea
13 pig adoption would be much better than selling in pet
14 shops because we're looking for guardians when
15 they're getting adopted instead of a sale. So, that
16 is my statement to support Intro. 4.

17 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much.
18 Next.

19 NINA BREGENZER: Hello, my name is Nina
20 Bregenzer. I'm here today to support Intro. 4.
21 Every day I see posts on social media of people who
22 want to rehome their guinea pigs that they have
23 bought on a whim from a pet store, not realizing the
24 cost and responsibility this entails.
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And just as often, I see posts about guinea pigs being dumped on the streets left to their own demise. By adopting from a shelter or rescue, the future pet owner will be vetted and educated leading to better animal welfare. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, next.

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NATASHA REZNIK: Good afternoon, my name is Natasha Reznik. I came today to support Intro. 4 legislation to prohibit sale of guinea pigs in New York City pet stores. I found my companion guinea pig outside abandoned by someone. He was just put outside. It was obvious my Chu Chu lived in a home and welcomed affection and friendship. It saddens me when I see pet stores selling guinea pigs relatively inexpensive. They seem small but they require care, food, safety and shelter by their people and can live from five to eight years. When reality sets in, guinea pigs are abandoned. My Chu Chu was a lucky one but I read stories they are abandoned in parks.

As they are born in captivity, they cannot forge or fend for themselves. They are subject to starvation or predation. Many are surrendered to shelters who are already very stressed with intake of

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2 animals. It is the compassionate thing to do to not
3 sell guinea pigs. Thank you.

4

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Just a quick
5 question Ms. Pilar. So, I was sitting here too
6 thinking, like why are they pets? Do you know that,
7 how that came about?

8

PILAR AMAYA: They shouldn't be pets but how are
9 they held? You shouldn't hold them.

10

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I know but how does that,
11 do you know how that, like through history? Not that
12 you might know but -

13

PILAR AMAYA: Well, I'm a Wildlife Biologist too.

14

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh, so how did that
15 happen? I'm just curious.

16

PILAR AMAYA: So, it's how did people -

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: It's like, how did they
18 become pets right?

19

PILAR AMAYA: Because they're cute. Have you
20 seen their face? They look like they have a
21 friendly, cute, little teddy bear face but they are
22 actually terrified of people. It's really sad. Just
23 walking over here, the Department of Education has a
24 classroom. There's a guinea pig by itself sitting in

25

1

2 sawdust in front of an open window with no place to
3 hide. That is terrifying for an animal like that.

4

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We'll work on that.

5

PILAR AMAYA: It's right over there. I took a
6 picture. It's also by itself.

7

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Would you send it to us
8 please?

9

PILAR AMAYA: Yeah.

10

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I know because they
11 weren't bred to be pets right?

12

PILAR AMAYA: No, they were domesticated because
13 they're adorable but they're not friendly animals.
14 It's not like a cat.

15

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Where are they originally
16 from, like what part of the world?

17

PILAR AMAYA: Peru I believe.

18

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I appreciate that because
19 I'm just trying to - I'm sitting here thinking about
20 this. One, I want to get this bill through but also
21 we're going to look at the other aspects of it.

22

That's why we're going to ask you to send, we'll get
23 you the email to - alright, she's going to give you
24 her card, okay.

25

PILAR AMAYA: Okay.

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2 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Because we want this to be
3 meaningful. So, I know we're here to discuss the
4 legislation but other things that come out of it, we
5 want to see what we can follow-up.

6 PILAR AMAYA: Okay, great, thanks.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will now be
8 moving to our last panel and it will be remote.
9 Ellen Crane, we're going to call you first.
10 Apologies again for all of the audio issues. Uhm,
11 before you begin, a member of our staff will unmute
12 you, please accept the prompt before you begin and
13 wait until the Sergeant queues you. Thank you.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're going to move to our
16 next panelist, Dominic Ocochela, please wait until
17 you are unmuted and accept the prompt and then wait
18 until the Sergeant queues you. Thank you.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

20 DOMINIC OCOCHELA: Thank you. Thank you
21 everybody for giving this matter attention finally.
22 Uhm, I just couldn't wait to tell this story.

23 Every so often a friend of mine asks me to look
24 after Ginger, her guinea pig. When I stop by to feed
25 her and clean her cage, she squeals with delight,

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2 Ginger that is, not my friend. She recognizes me and
3 when I first come up to her spacious abode, she
4 sticks her nose to the cage, nibbles and wants a
5 treat. When I put my finger near her nose, she
6 gently bumps it. She does not fight me. Sometimes
7 before feeding her, I pick her up. I place her
8 against my chest and she purrs. But it turns out she
9 does not like being picked up and when I leave, she
10 screams with fret. If I cannot pick her up, for I am
11 also allergic, I can pet her, she purrs. But once
12 she's been fed, I cannot touch her. She will jump
13 and run off and hide in one of her many chambers.
14 She will tell me to leave her alone. I have
15 severed my purpose and I am no longer needed, no
16 longer important. This happens again and again and I
17 am simply floored at her ability to emote and play
18 and know what she wants and know what to do and to
19 say to get it. Clearly, Ginger is a [INAUDIBLE
20 2:34:22] and yet her sisters and brothers are not in
21 this city being treated with dignity and the us. But
22 today's proposed ban is one small step we can take to
23 ameliorate this terrible situation. Animals being
24 purchased as pets from pet stores when there are
25 plenty of homeless ones in our shelters and on our

1
2 streets is massively problematic. This strikes at
3 the core of what is wrong with a community that
4 professes to care for life and yet allows animals to
5 be used and discarded like fast fashion.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 DOMINIC OCOCHELA: Some might say – okay. So,
8 yeah, I just wanted to say I fully support this ban.
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And as a reminder, everyone
12 can submit written testimony up to 72 hours after
13 this hearing at testimony@council.nyc.gov and
14 Committee Staff as well as the Chair, we review all
15 testimony in full.

16 The next three panelists, I'll just name them all
17 so you all are prepared with be Schavara Syrabian,
18 Jennifer Shannon, Aditta Berncrant. Schavara, you
19 may begin after the staff unmutes you. You accept
20 the prompt and the Sergeant queues you. Thank you.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 SCHAVARA SYRABIAN: Hi, thank you for your time
23 and thank you for taking this bill under
24 consideration. I just want to echo everything that's
25 been said here today. I have also as a child had

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2 small animal pets that were not properly taken care
3 of because they did not belong in a family that
4 wasn't properly ready to take on that responsibility
5 or for a child to, and I still do feel remorse to
6 this day and it did impact me and I do feel like it
7 probably does impact these families who aren't
8 properly educated.

9 And I do also volunteer at the ACPCA as part of
10 the adoption team and I know how much care they put
11 into and time into educating and helping and taking
12 back animals that people can't take them on and that
13 is just such a better way to go about it. It's
14 better for the human and it's better for the animal.
15 And so, thank you again for taking this into
16 consideration.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next panelist
18 will be Jennifer Shannon. Please accept the unmute
19 and you may begin once the Sergeant queues you.
20 Thank you.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

22 JENNIFER SHANNON: Hi, thank you for taking my
23 testimony. I always had dogs and cats growing up and
24 in the recent few years, I have rescued a rabbit in
25 the park and that's where my small animal journey

1
2 began. So, I fostered rabbits for years now and I
3 just got into guinea pig rescue about two years ago.
4 I currently have four guinea pigs, none of which I
5 went out to actively buy or adopt. They were dumped
6 in parks in my local neighborhood and uhm, in our
7 local group there were concerns guinea pigs found in
8 the park. Did anybody lose their guinea pig? I'm
9 like, nobody lost their guinea pigs.

10 So, I got a team together because I did do the
11 rabbit rescue with All About Rabbit Rescue and I
12 said, alright, we can get these guinea pigs. Four
13 hours, four hours to rescue all of these guinea pigs
14 on two different occasions. Uhm, I'm going to echo
15 what everybody else said is, they are a very
16 difficult pet to take care of. They don't like the
17 contact life everybody else has said. They love you
18 when you have food for them. They require a lot of
19 work. The one guinea pig that I finally wanted to
20 that I finally accepted that I would no longer foster
21 and they're mine, just went to the vet. It cost me
22 \$500 in the past two visits because she has a slight
23 cold and she has to stay on antibiotics for three
24 weeks, just to make sure she's okay.

1
2 I used to shop in our local Petco all the time
3 for rabbit supplies. I can't go in there at all
4 because they don't have anything for guinea pigs but
5 yet they sell guinea pigs and that is the most
6 confusing part to me. And I've deliberately had
7 conversations with people that work there and as nice
8 as they are, cannot tell you anything about the
9 guinea pig. Just basic conversation. What do they
10 eat? What kind of care? Should I just adopt one and
11 they can't answer any of the questions. They give
12 you very, very bare minimum knowledge and it amazes
13 me, something as simple as this is supposed to take
14 Vitamin C every single day but yet they don't sell
15 it. So, I said, how do you sell guinea pigs if you
16 don't even have the supplies like they need? And you
17 don't even have carriers, how do I get the guinea pig
18 home. Well, we'll put him in a box for you.

19 Well, why wouldn't you sell carriers if you're
20 selling guinea pigs?

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 JENNIFER SHANNON: So, I mean that's a concern to
23 me too and I understand the gentleman was saying, he
24 supports the efforts of everybody but I go into pet
25 stores and they're not prepared to help people

1

2 understand the care that these small, little animals
3 need and it's just cruel and I fully support Intro. 4
4 and I thank you for bringing this to the floor and
5 thank you for hearing me today and I will also be
6 submitting written testimony.

7

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very, very much.

8

JENNIFER SHANNON: Thank you.

9

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next panelist will be
11 Sedotta Bernkrant. Please wait and accept the prompt
12 to be unmuted and then wait until the Sergeant queues
13 you and then you may begin. Thanks.

13

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

14

15 SEDOTTA BERNKRANT: Thank you, Health Committee
16 Chair Lynn Schulman, members of the Health Committee,
17 Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala for holding this important
18 hearing. My name is Sedotta Bernkrant and I am the
19 Executive Director of NYCLASS, New Yorkers for Clean
20 Livable and Safe Streets.

20

21 NYCLASS strongly supports passage of Intro. 4,
22 which would prohibit the sale of guinea pigs in New
23 York City pet shops and there's been so many amazing
24 information given today. I'm not going to repeat it
25 besides to say that Intro. 4 really presents a

25

1
2 commonsense solution to the large and growing problem
3 that we've all learned about today.

4 When I was a child, we actually did have numerous
5 guinea pigs and as an adult, I understand that we had
6 no idea how to take care of them. We're not given
7 proper information and that's an unfortunate
8 situation that we hear is still happening today,
9 decades later. So, when Intro. — I just want to end
10 on saying that when Intro. 4 passes, New York City
11 residents can still adopt guinea pigs as pets into
12 their homes and families if they chose to do so.
13 They just won't be purchasing them from pet shops as
14 cheap impulse buys but instead adopting from
15 responsible shelters and rescue groups across the
16 city, which can educate them about the specific needs
17 and significant responsibilities that go along with
18 the lifelong care of guinea pigs. Information that I
19 was not given, my parents were not given as a child.

20 So, on behalf of NYCLASS, we hope that you will
21 pass Intro. 4 to end the needless suffering and
22 deaths of thousands of guinea pigs and to help
23 educate and promote more responsible pet ownership
24 for all New Yorkers. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very, very much. Yeah, I'm just going to wrap up. That was the last testimony that we had. I want to thank everyone who participated today and uhm, you know this is something that is very important to me. I know it's very important to folks that are here today. We're going to push to get this passed as quickly as we can. I also want to stress to folks that some of the things that were brought up today separate from this. That we're going to also take a look at that as well. So, I just wanted you to know that. That's why we're here. That's why we have these hearings and please feel free to contact the Committee or my office if anybody needs anything.

And with that, [GAVEL] we're done.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Oh, wait, before that sorry, sorry. I just wanted to make a little quick spiel, sorry. I just want to see if there's anyone present in the room or on Zoom that hasn't had the opportunity to testify, please raise your hand. We're going to check Zoom quickly. Nope, alright, seeing no one else, I'd like to note again, that written testimony, which will be reviewed in full maybe submitted to the record up to 72 hours after

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the close of this hearing by emailing it to
testimony@council.nyc.gov. Chair Schulman, we have
now concluded public testimony for this hearing.
Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, now I can do that.

[GAVEL].

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date December 31, 2022