



File photo

People protest a Port Jefferson pet store that displayed puppy mill dogs and has since gone out of business.

# Puppy mill bill passes

## County law carries stricter rules for local pet stores

BY ELANA GLOWATZ

Suffolk County has taken a step toward better protecting animals with a new law that will toughen regulations on pet stores, with the goal of eliminating sales of puppy mill dogs.

The Suffolk County Legislature voted on June 3 to approve the bill, which was introduced by Legislator Jay Schneiderman (I-Montauk), co-sponsored by Legislator William "Doc" Spencer (D-Centerport) and still must be signed by County Executive Steve Bellone.

It will prohibit local pet stores and dealers from selling cats and dogs until they are at least 8 weeks old and weaned, and from getting animals from breeders to whom the U.S. Department of Agriculture has recently issued violations. According to the legislation, breeders that are off-limits include those that have received violations related to their animals' health in the last two years or that have any other violations on their most recent USDA reports.

In addition, the legislation requires that within the pet stores, animals must be kept in enclosures proportional to their sizes — and includes measurements for calculating those sizes — and have fresh water and food at least twice a day. The stores must provide information to customers about an animal's origin upon request and keep records of its purchases for two years — the Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing & Consumer Affairs will check the documentation as it enforces the new regulations.

The county law comes a few months after the state added a new provision to the general business law, granting local governments the authority to enact their

own laws that would regulate breeders and pet stores in a manner stricter than state law.

Dogs raised in puppy mills nationwide are neglected and mistreated, and there are cases of cats that are bred under similar conditions as well.

In puppy mills, the animals are kept in small enclosures, where the mothers are overbred and puppies are not socialized. Because the people running the puppy mills treat them "like a crop," according to Roy Gross, chief of the Suffolk County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the animals are often sick or have other health issues.

"It's like a concentration camp for animals," he said in a recent phone interview, and most of the country's pet stores sell dogs from those mills.

Spencer said in a press release that the county's new law was crafted using input from both animal rights activists and local pet stores.

"Our legislation was the product of a significant grassroots movement that has long sought to improve the quality of pets being sold to the public while simultaneously recognizing the needs of local pet stores," he said. "It is strong, it will inform our residents, and it will ensure that they purchase pets that are healthy."

Pet stores and dealers will be fined \$500 for each separate violation of the new county law.

Save-A-Pet Animal Rescue and Adoption Center Founder and President Dori Scofield said in a recent phone interview that she would rather see a complete ban on the retail sale of dogs because while the county law is a start, she believes it boils down to "letting [pet stores] get their dogs from the best of the worst."