

Minister Colwell and Honorable Members;

My name is Kelly Marcoux and I am a retired Animal Health Technologist. I have a career that spanned 35 years in the Animal Care field, working in clinical practice, agriculture and veterinary industry pharmaceutical sales. I have served on Accreditation Committees for the CVMA and the Canadian Council on Animal Care following graduation from NSAC. I have been a strong supporter of veterinarians and their health care teams and worked closely with Atlantic Canadian Veterinarians in the 16 years I was in sales prior to retirement. I grew up with animals - horses, dogs, cats, goats, rabbits. I have worked on dairy, swine, poultry, beef and sheep operations. I have had a diverse and rich career working with animals, and people just like me who love and care for them. I am a well educated, intelligent, articulate, kind and caring person. The humane treatment of animals is foremost in my mind. From that standpoint we share a common thread; I am just like all of you in this room today.

I own a breed of dog I am passionate about. I love my dogs deeply. According to Bill 27 section 1(f), we are now "custodians" of our animals. We are not custodians. We are not pet parents. They are not our "fur babies". We are their owners. They are their partners. They are our family.

I am a hobby breeder, one who has yet to put a litter on the ground because I have spent years choosing just the right parentage for my puppies. When I made the decision to speak today to Bill 27, I carefully planned a presentation to defend the rights of breeders to choose to what is best for their puppies. That was specifically targeted at the removal of tails and dewclaws. I will always defend that right. But when a group of us met to discuss our concerns about this Bill and the implications of it, I changed that plan. Although I feel it is our right to choose to dock our puppies tails and remove their dewclaws to protect them from injuries in their lives, I feel even more urgently the need to defend our rights as human beings.

I thought I lived in Canada - I thought this was a democratic society that embraces diversity and allows us to live within our rights and freedoms. I thought we were living in a society where we had the right to be free from harassment, bullying, and intimidation. I am reconsidering this. Last night, I met many like minded breeder colleagues for the first time. I am a bit of an unknown in the dog fancy community. One of my dogs is in training to be a therapy dog because I have a strong desire to share her calm, quiet and loving demeanour with those who are in need. I believe in carefully selecting potential breeding animals, doing genetic testing, health clearances and letting that dog grow up before ever entertaining breeding. I care deeply about selecting owners who will give only the best homes to my puppies. I believe that in breeding a dog, her puppies are your commitment for life, and if, despite your best efforts, one of those puppies finds itself in a situation, through no fault of it's own, where it needs to be re-homed, that I am the one to do that and they can always come back to me. Breeding is a huge commitment, it is not for the faint of heart. It is sometimes heartbreaking, exhausting work. But in that room last night, I saw people who had that very same commitment and desire for their own breeds. These are kind, caring, committed people. Yet, these appear to be the very people being targeted by Bill 27.

I left that gathering with an overwhelming sense of fear. FEAR. Fear that I or my dogs could be traumatized by an SPCA inspection at any place, at any time for whatever reason the SPCA may deem necessary. They could be taken from their boarding facility or snatched away from me at a show, or for that matter when we are out driving in the community if they see fit. What is the matter when a Bill introduced that is supposed to be directed at the well being and safety of animals makes you as a responsible, ethical and law abiding individual afraid? We are not the ones who should be targeted by Bill 27. Yet, we feel we are.

I heard one colleague's experience with literally being terrorized by the SPCA. They had no reasonable grounds for an inspection. They violated her privacy, they were aggressive in their approach and demeanour, and they made unreasonable demands that were outside of the confines of the current Bill. They threatened to seize her dogs. They entered her home and went through it. She was terrified. They violated her biosecurity measures to keep her dogs safe and free of exposure to pathogens by coming into her home and kennel after admittedly visiting a number of other properties with animals that day. This is irresponsible and speaks to the lack of training and experience these inspectors appear to have. They do not understand the implications of such behaviour, that it could bring a disease such as parvovirus into her home and wipe out her dogs. She did not know who to turn to to defend her from such a violation of her rights and freedoms. She now lives with anxiety and fear that at any time they can return and do it all over again.

Minister Colwell and Honourable members, I ask you to put yourselves in her shoes. How would you feel to have strangers enter your home, go through it, examine your pets, demand documents and records pertaining to them

and challenge you on how you care for them when you know you are doing everything right and animals are safe in your care? I ask you to be honest with yourselves and look deeply into your conscience to consider if this is just.

Coming to speak to you today, makes every single one of us afraid. We could easily become targets now, based on our appearance and the fact that there are undoubtedly persons from the SPCA or other animal welfare or animal rights groups in our midst. How can this be right? NS is becoming a police state when it comes to animal welfare. We see the inspectors from the SPCA appear on tv during interviews wearing flack jackets, bullet proof vests? What message does this send to the public? This deliberately sows fear and intimidation in the pet owning community.

We need to be working together to improve and protect the welfare of animals in this province, this is without question. The SPCA should be our allies, not a group we fear.

Bill 27 is vague in it's language and open to wide interpretation. It affords an incredible amount of power to the SPCA to violate the rights of pet owners and law abiding citizens. The pet owning public has never been consulted on this Bill, it appears it was conceived under cover of darkness, and is being fast tracked so that it passes before we ever have a chance to ask for clarification or modifications. Is this a democratic process? I heard from one of my own family members who is involved to some degree in the animal rights/animal welfare movement Thursday night. She told me that "they" knew about this Bill being tabled the day before it hit the media. How is this even possible? I cannot help but feel there is an urgency to push this Bill through as fast as possible and make it law. There is little to no opportunity to hear from the citizens and voters who it will affect. Their concerns appear to be ignored. There is no transparency, there is a lack of democratic consultation. One cannot help but question what exactly is driving this radically changed directive.

Minister Colwell and all the members of the Committee, as a Nova Scotian I am shocked and saddened at the contents of Bill 27 and the manner in which it has been presented. It stands to cause unintended consequences for many Nova Scotians who are animal owners and breeders who take good care of their animals and add so much to the economy of this province. It makes me seriously reconsider breeding as it restricts my rights to produce pups to the breed standard and to do what is best for my puppies. It makes me want to sell my home, pack up my family and move to another province where such Bills may be constructed in a more transparent, consultative and democratic manner. Please reconsider passing this Bill without further consultation with stakeholders and clarity to the pet owning public.

Thank you very much for taking the time to allow me to voice my concerns.

I am happy to take any questions at this time.

An Act to Protect Animals and to Aid Animals in Distress

Be it enacted by the Governor and Assembly as follows:

1 This Act may be cited as the Animal Protection Act.

2 (1) In this Act,

(a) "abandoned" means, in respect of an animal, that the animal appears to be ownerless after reasonable steps have been taken to contact its owner or its custodian on behalf of the owner;

(b) "animal" means a non-human vertebrate;

(c) "Appeal Board" means the Animal Welfare Appeal Board established by this Act;

(d) "Chief Inspector" means the person appointed as Chief Inspector for the Society under this Act;

(e) "companion animal" means an animal other than a farm animal;

(f) "custodian", in respect of an animal, means

- (i) an owner of the animal,
- (ii) a parent of a minor who is an owner of the animal,
- (iii) a person who has possession of the animal,
- (iv) a person who has been given custody, care of, management of or control over the animal,
- (v) a person who had possession of the animal or had custody, care of, management of or control over the animal immediately before the animal was seized, taken into custody or abandoned, or
- (vi) any other person who at law has responsibility for the animal;