

## Bill to Restrict Unweaned Birds in Massachusetts Heads to Senate Floor

**Recently amended SB 147 was passed by a Senate committee, readying it for debate by the whole Senate**

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The amended version of Senate bill 147 would ban the sale of unweaned birds and restrict their movement within Massachusetts.

A Massachusetts joint legislative committee recently passed a bill that would ban the sale of unweaned birds and restrict their movement in the state.

After passing favorably in the Joint Committee on Community Development and Small Business, the bill goes to the Senate Ethics and Rules committee, which will hold it until the Senate president calls it up for debate on the floor.

The Rules committee does not have plans to hold a hearing or otherwise discuss the bill, according to an aide in committee chair Senator Joan Menard's office.

An amended version of Senate bill 147 obtained by Pet Product News from the office of Senator Harriette Chandler's, chair of the Joint Committee on Community Development and Small Business, reads, "A commercial establishment, pet shop, firm, corporation or private individual shall not import an unweaned pet bird into the commonwealth or export a pet bird out of the commonwealth for sale or resale."

"Private individual" and "export" were added to the amended version, although the Senators are still at work on a final version to present to the Senate, a legislative research aide from Chandler's office said.

The amended version defines an unweaned pet bird as: "a pet or companion psittacine that is too young to eat and sustain its own life without hand-feeding or parental feeding assistance."

The amended version also requires documentation for birds sold, resold or transported in Massachusetts that includes hatch dates, hatch location, the bird's breeder and the bird's weight before and upon sale and transport.

SB147 was introduced this legislative session by Senator Michael Morrissey after a similar bill by him died in last year's session, both the American Federation of Aviculture (AFA) and the Pet Industry Joint Council (PIJAC) strongly oppose the measure.

Members of the joint committee were surprised by the three-hour debate that ensued prior to its passage, the Chandler aide said.

Aviculturists from as far as Florida have been calling Chandler's office to ask for clarification on the bill that could prevent them from selling young birds to Massachusetts' vendors.

The AFA, an organization which represents aviculturists with many interests in bird care, bird conservation, bird keeping and more, does not endorse any regulation "on issues of personal responsibility surrounding the transfer of unweaned baby birds by attempting to define or qualify who can or cannot provide proper care or hand-feeding."

It does, however, agree with the transfer of an unweaned bird to any person experienced in modern practices of hand-feeding.

It's a common business practice for pet bird breeders to ship unweaned pet birds to stores or other breeders to finish the hand-feeding, either because the person is an expert hand-feeder or to begin socializing the bird in its environment prior to sale.

In its position statement, PIJAC wrote, "As drafted, SB 147 would shut down virtually all Massachusetts bird breeders as well as cripple many pet stores that specialize in receiving and handling unweaned birds, a practice which has been successful for many years without problems."



Calling the bill unjustified, the pet industry group says there is a lack of evidence that such legislation is needed.

The group wrote: "Why should experienced retail personnel be denied the ability to hand-feed and socialize birds in a pet store environment? These persons are well trained to handle the animals properly, and have an economic interest in ensuring such animals are properly cared for."

Testimony in support of the bill at its April hearing came from animal humane groups, including an avian shelter.