

MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT
Committee on Animals and the Law

Animals # 24-a

January 20, 2026

S.6621

A.1685

By: Senator Harckham

By: M. of A. Rosenthal

Senate Committee: Environmental
Conservation

Assembly Committee: Environmental
Conservation

Effective Date: This act shall take effect on
the sixtieth day after it shall have become a
law

AN ACT to amend the environmental conservation law, in relation to prohibiting the breeding, sale, trade, purchase, importation, and exportation of red-eared slider turtles

Law and Section Referred to: The Environmental and Conservation Law is amended by adding a new section, Section 11-0541.

THE COMMITTEE ON ANIMALS AND THE LAW
SUPPORTS THIS LEGISLATION

There is a grave need for this bill, which would stop a silent environmental crisis that is occurring not only in our state, but also in states and provinces around the country and the world, regarding red eared slider (“RES”) turtles. Currently, there are countless RES turtles sold in pet stores, on street corners, and in small shops, especially throughout the City of New York.

Current federal law deems it illegal to sell any turtle less than four inches long.¹ The purpose of this law, which was enacted in 1975, was to prevent the spread of salmonella. It was not enacted with respect to environmental concerns or the welfare of animals. Such objectives need to be addressed, however, and this bill would accomplish that.

Large pet suppliers such as Petco and PetSmart sell RES turtles, by simply buying them from warehouses that house them until they reach four inches long, which can generally take about one year (the time varies). After that, RES turtles can grow to be up to twelve inches long, and some

¹ <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-21/chapter-I/subchapter-L/part-1240#1240.62>, Code of Federal Regulations, § 1240.62 Turtles intrastate and interstate requirements, (b) *Sales; general prohibition*. “Except as otherwise provided in this section, viable turtle eggs and live turtles with a carapace length of less than 4 inches shall not be sold, held for sale, or offered for any other type of commercial or public distribution.” (last viewed May 19,2025).

are even larger. Despite the federal law, which is virtually never enforced, small shops and illegal vendors sell tiny baby RES turtles that are not even an inch long.

While the RES turtles may appear to make “cute” pets at one to four inches long, they require a great deal of care, time, and money, and will grow to be quite large. They require an adequately sized tank, which will require either special filters or daily cleanings. Failure to properly and sufficiently clean the tanks will result in filthy, smelly water quite quickly, literally within a matter of two days. RES turtles require special lighting to mimic the sun, since they must “bask” – the light and heat from the sun is critical to their growth, development, and health. Likewise, they require appropriate additions to their tank to allow for basking and stimulation. Of course, they require adequate and appropriate food.

Once the purchasers discover and experience the amount of time, money, and care these animals actually require, sadly, the animals are routinely discarded, many in local parks, ponds, or lakes. This has occurred so frequently, and in such masses, that many states consider RES turtles an “invasive species,” including New York. This is because the RES turtle is a hearty survivalist in the wild, and they will consume resources that were available for native species and animals prior to the appearance of RES turtles in a particular park, pond, or lake. Their unnatural presence in these locations poses a substantial threat to natural ecosystems.

In addition to the environmental destruction created when these animals are discarded, the animal cruelty involved in the RES turtle industry, affecting RES turtles both before and after they are purchased, is astounding.² Many purchasers are simply not equipped to give these animals safe, enjoyable environments, where the turtles can thrive; and as a result, the animals live miserable lives in filthy water, with health issues created by the unclean water, undersized tank, and/or lack of proper lighting, in addition to a total lack of stimulation. Some are flushed down toilets, where they will die a slow, painful death; others are crushed, smashed, or otherwise killed once they become inconvenient. Many RES turtles are discarded by being dumped on salt water ocean beaches, but they are not salt water animals, so they will not survive there. Turtle rescue organizations have been inundated with unwanted RES turtles for years, to the point where many simply do not accept any RES turtles any longer. Turtle Rescue of Long Island, for example, states on their website, “Please note: As of August 1st, 2015, TRLI will no longer be taking in non-native turtles and tortoises which includes red eared sliders... .”³

² For more information on the horrors of the RES turtle industry, and why it needs to end in New York State, see: <https://www.newsweek.com/illegal-animal-traders-have-turned-baby-red-eared-sliders-health-and-337903> (last visited May 19, 2025); <https://www.turtleguardians.com/2018/10/red-red-eared-sliders-they-can-hurt-the-environment-but-are-also-harmed-by-us/> (last visited May 19, 2025); <https://www.oriannesociety.org/faces-of-the-forest/success-of-red-eared-sliders/?v=f69b47f43ce4> (last visited May 19, 2025).

³ <https://www.turtlerescues.com/> (last visited May 19, 2025).

In the wild, RES turtles live in groups, basking together on logs or rocks. In tanks, however, they are often isolated or, if someone has more than one, due to the limited space and other factors related to their unnatural confinement, they can bully one another and become aggressive. The cycle of purchasing RES turtles and then discarding them into parks, ponds, and lakes is unending. As this bill points out, it is currently “illegal for a pet owner to release a red-eared slider into the wild in New York, [but] the regulation is unenforceable, and the commerce in red-eared sliders is unabated, resulting in the continuing spread of red-eared sliders in waters ranging from Buffalo to New York City's parks.”⁴

By allowing the continued sale, distribution, and purchase of these defenseless animals, the environment suffers, this destructive cycle continues, other species suffer, and the RES turtles suffer. The only ones who gain from this cycle are the ones profiting from these sales.

This destructive cycle must stop in New York State. Eleven states currently ban the sale of RES turtles, and many others place restrictions on their importation and sale.⁵ New York must join them.

In light of the above, the New York State Bar Association’s Committee on Animals and the Law wholeheartedly supports a prohibition on the breeding, sale, trade, purchase, importation, and exportation of red-eared slider turtles, and SUPPORTS the passage and enactment of this bill to enact such a prohibition.

⁴ New York Senate Bill 6621 and Assembly Bill 1685 of 2025, Section 1. Legislative intent, paragraph 5, page 1, lines 16-20.

⁵ Sea Grant Law Center, “Mitigating the Risks of Aquatic Invasive Species in Commerce; Legal Case Study: Red-Eared Slider,” <https://nsglc.olemiss.edu/projects/invasivespecies/files/legal-case-study-red-eared-slider.pdf> (last visited May 19, 2025).

Opinions expressed are those of the Section/Committee preparing this memorandum and do not represent those of the New York State Bar Association unless and until they have been adopted by its House of Delegates or Executive Committee.