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## Lobbyist Ron Book tends to get his way in Miami-Dade, but this time it's a No.

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May 15, 2018 11:58 PM

Miami-Dade commissioners unanimously rejected county lobbyist Ron Book's request for a waiver to represent pet stores that had pushed state lawmakers to block local regulations of puppy sales.

The 12 to 0 vote represented a rare rejection for Book before the commission, which has consistently waived term-limit and residency requirements to allow the powerful lobbyist to remain the volunteer head of the county's homeless board. Book represents dozens of local governments in Tallahassee, including Miami-Dade, as well as private-sector clients.

Near the end of the 2018 legislative session, he requested a waiver for him and two lobbyists to represent a group tied to the Petland pet-store chain while also being paid by Miami-Dade County. The waiver came as Petland sought state legislation that would have blocked local governments like Miami-Dade from regulating puppy sales, pursuing the kind of preemption of county lawmaking that Miami-Dade commissioners routinely fume about when discussing Tallahassee.

"I'm not going to cede any power to the state," Commissioner Dennis Moss said Tuesday before voting to follow the recommendation of the county's Ethics Commission and reject Book's wavier request.

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The commission was set to vote on the waiver at its last meeting, but Chairman Esteban "Steve" Bovo postponed the decision because Book wasn't there to defend himself in person. Book also did not attend Tuesday's meeting. The commission voted to deny the waiver for him and two county lobbyists Book hired for the pet-store matter, Nelson Diaz and Sean Pittman.

"We love our animals and we set our rules," said Commissioner Rebeca Sosa, who sponsored the item denying the waiver. In a text message, Book said he can still represent the pet-store industry in Tallahassee, as long as he doesn't advocate for any legislation that would preempt local laws. Book, based in Aventura, earned \$120,000 last year on his county lobbying contract.

Activists for local laws banning most sales of puppies and kittens seized on Book's representation of Florida Pet Retailers as a slap in the face to Miami-Dade's efforts to boost adoption of shelter animals.

"I hope the county's unanimous vote will be the standard for all local governments who hire state lobbyists like Mr. Book," said Michele Lazarow, the vice mayor of Hallandale Beach and president of the Animal Defense Coalition, which lobbied against the state bill and helped pass local puppy-sale bans across Florida. "Lobbyists shouldn't be able to profit from both sides."

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