



The Honorable Ron Young, Chairman
Economic Development, Commerce and Labor Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Young:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 263. I am a veterinarian and Assistant Professor at the Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM). In addition to a DVM I have a Masters of Public Health degree with a specialization in Veterinary Public Health. I worked in the Ohio Department of Health Zoonotic Disease Program for 5 years prior to joining the CVM faculty where I currently teach in the core veterinary curriculum as well as the Veterinary Public Health Program. Much of my experience has focused on animals in public settings. More specifically on the associated risks and prevention measures.

As a veterinarian, public health professional, and life-long pet owner I am convinced that the benefits of having pets far outweigh the risks. I believe that many dog owners will enjoy dining with their dogs, should House Bill 263 pass; I know I will be one of them. However, there are some potential risks associated with this activity and I recommend that the bill be amended to allow business owners and regulatory authorities to mitigate these risks when needed, in order to protect public health.

Dog related concerns that should be taken into consideration include bites and other injuries from a fractious dog, and infectious diseases spread from dog to dog or from dog to person. Even the most well behaved dog can react aggressively or boisterously in certain situations. A person could be injured from being knocked down or bitten. Even aggression directed toward another dog can be dangerous as people are often bitten when trying to separate fighting dogs. I would like to underscore that banning specific breeds would not be an effective way of reducing the risk of injury. Rather, business owners should be given the authority to refuse access or to ask dog owners to remove their dog if it is behaving in a way that presents a potential threat to public safety. I support the provision that dogs be kept on a leash and under the control of a responsible adult, and suggest this be kept in all future drafts put forth.

Infectious diseases can be spread through direct contact with an infected individual or through indirect contact with a contaminated environment, including air, water, and food. In most situations, well cared for dogs that are provided routine veterinary care present very little risk to other dogs and humans. There are some conditions though that signal an increase in risk such as diarrhea, coughing, and unexplained hair loss. In addition to the precautions already included in the bill, I suggest that language be added so that business



owners will be able to exclude individual dogs based on their apparent health status. By excluding sick dogs, the risk of disease transmission is further reduced.

The existing federal regulations for service dogs, as part of the Americans with Disabilities Act, have similar stipulations to those recommended above. Service dogs can be excluded if they are not housebroken or if they present a direct threat to the health or safety of others.

The recommendations above would provide additional protection against the local spread of disease to other dogs or patrons present, but there are larger concerns when there is an outbreak of disease affecting a community or region. Canine Influenza which has been circulating in the US since 2004, causing sometimes community level and sometimes multi-state level outbreaks, is one example. The current strains of canine flu do not affect humans, but influenza is constantly mutating and there is a risk that it could acquire the ability to affect humans in the future. Regulatory authorities should have the ability to temporarily suspend the presence of dogs in eating establishments. This would aid in the control of highly contagious dog diseases that are spread largely through proximity to other dogs. And this would benefit public health, should an outbreak also involve the risk of associated human cases. Though it is understood that this would rarely need to be undertaken, it is essential that the mechanism be in place should the need arise.

In my opinion, putting additional protections in place to prevent injury and disease transmission in these public settings will benefit all parties by providing a safer and healthier environment for both the dogs and the patrons.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanette O'Quin, DVM, MPH-VPH
Clinical Assistant Professor