



## HOUSE BILL 523 – PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF

Mary O'Connor-Shaver, Representative  
Rescue Me Ohio (RMO)

March 14, 2018 – House Community and Family Advancement Committee

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Good afternoon Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair LaTourette, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee.

My name is Mary O'Connor-Shaver and I am here today in my capacity as Board Secretary presenting on behalf of Rescue Me Ohio ("RMO"), a 501(c)(3) education and advocacy nonprofit corporation with a focus on assisting shelters, pounds, humane societies and animal rescues to improve the lives of companion animals throughout Ohio. RMO counts among its 258,000 supporters: veterinarians, dog wardens, shelter staff, animal rescues, animal welfare advocates, dog enthusiasts, state and local elected officials, attorneys, and judges.

Given our organization's dedication to supporting legislative efforts which proactively address animal abuse, neglect and cruelty, I would like to begin my presentation by thanking Representatives Lanese and Perales for their leadership in sponsoring this important piece of legislation for Ohio voters and taxpayers.

There are many forms of animal abuse with which veterinarians, veterinary technicians and social service and counseling professionals are faced in daily practice, and range from minor neglect to willful and malicious intent to harm. While neglectful acts are often unintentional and can often be addressed through education, intentional forms of animal abuse can be indicators of other forms of violence.

Studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between animal abuse and other forms of family violence, including, child abuse, spousal abuse and elder abuse. Since veterinarians, veterinary technicians, social service and counseling professionals have a responsibility to the welfare of animals and the public and are often the first to discover animal abuse in a family, it is the position of RMO they should take an active role in preventing animal abuse and cruelty.

While some states do not require veterinarians, veterinary technicians, social service and counseling professionals to report animal abuse, RMO supports the adoption of laws requiring these individuals from **recklessly** failing to report abuse of a companion animal as defined under O.R.C. 959.131. We firmly believe reporting should only be required when client education has failed, when there is no likelihood that client education will be successful, or in situations in which immediate intervention is indicated and only when the law exempts these individuals from civil and criminal liability for reporting.

RMO recognizes that veterinarians, veterinary technicians, social service and counseling professionals may observe cases of animal abuse or neglect as defined by federal or state laws, or local ordinances. When these situations cannot be resolved through education, RMO firmly believes it to be the responsibility of these individuals to report such cases to a law enforcement officer, humane society agent, or animal welfare professional. Similarly, RMO also supports efforts prohibiting a law enforcement officer, humane society agent, or animal welfare professional from **recklessly** failing to report abuse of a companion animal to an appropriate social service professional.

We believe **Ohio House Bill 523** to be a reasonable and balanced piece of proposed legislation which would encourage veterinarians, veterinary technicians, social service and counseling professionals to be responsible leaders in their communities by collaborating with other animal and human welfare groups and professionals in the detection and reporting of animal abuse, neglect and cruelty.

It is our hope this Committee will reflect on the opinions expressed by our group and supporters in today's testimony prior to recommending **Ohio House Bill 523** for review and passage by the Ohio House.

As the representative for Rescue Me Ohio, I greatly appreciate your time and consideration on this important piece of legislation for Ohioans, and I welcome any questions you may have.



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## Addendum

### Abuse Reporting Requirements by State

In recent years, several states have focused their attention on animal abuse, neglect and cruelty reporting by veterinarians, health care providers and other social service providers.

The map below shows state laws and regulations that RMO is aware of which require or encourage veterinarians and veterinarian technicians to report animal abuse and cruelty. The map also includes states that provide civil and criminal immunity for good faith reporting of animal abuse.

