



**Proponent Testimony on House Bill 523  
House Community and Family Advancement**

Sharon Harvey, President and CEO, Cleveland Animal Protective League  
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Chair Ginter, Vice Chair LaTourette, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 523, legislation to strengthen Ohio's animal and child abuse reporting laws.

I am the President & CEO of the Cleveland Animal Protective League (APL), the humane society for Cuyahoga County. We are a private, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization organized under Ohio Revised Code 1717, and as such, are also authorized to appoint humane agents who enforce Ohio's animal protection laws.

In their sponsor testimony, Representatives Lanese and Perales correctly identified the link that exists between animal abuse and domestic violence. The sponsors' focus on increasing reporting for these offenses is extremely important and the Cleveland APL supports this goal.

Humane agents employed by county humane societies are required to report suspected child abuse under O.R.C. 2151.421. We have long advocated for reciprocal animal abuse reporting by social service professionals given their interaction inside the homes of the families they serve. The inclusion of this provision is a great step towards providing protection for children and animals in our state.

Because of the inclusion of reciprocal reporting in this bill, the Cleveland APL is submitting proponent testimony for this bill. However, we do have concerns with the inclusion of criminal penalties for failing to immediately report suspected abuse. Our agents take abuse reporting very seriously, and strive to ensure the safety of families and animals they come into contact with. Suspected violations of O.R.C. 959 often require ongoing investigation. The level of abuse or neglect will range in severity. Instead of encouraging and empowering individuals best suited to protect animals and children from cruelty, we are threatening criminal penalties for failure to report suspicions that may open to interpretation at any given time. We strongly agree there should be consequences for failure to report. We ask that the sponsors continue working with interested parties to craft language that encourages appropriate action by these professionals, but withholds the pursuit of criminal penalties for subsequent failure to report.

Also on the subject of unintended consequences, we understand and appreciate the concern that some veterinarians may have with their mandatory reporting requirements in the bill. We would hate to see pet owners not come forward for veterinary visits if they fear they may be subject to abuse reporting because they waited too long to schedule a visit.

In summary, we believe this bill takes a very positive step forward in recognizing the need for additional attention to Ohio's abuse reporting requirements. We look forward to continuing to work with the sponsors on the bill. Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of this legislation. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have.