

**House Community and Family Advancement
Committee
HB 523, Cross-reporting
Proponent Testimony by Beth Sheehan
March 14, 2018**

Good afternoon, Chair Ginter, Vice Chair LaTourette, Ranking Minority Member Boyd and distinguished members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee, I am Beth Sheehan from Hamilton County, representing an Ohio grassroots group, Paws and the Law, advocating for the swift, diligent passage of HB 523.

HB 523, Cross-reporting, offers relief to Ohio families, long suffering under the burden of unrestrained violence. It adds another layer of defense against the nasty web of abuse at work in the shadows of many, Ohio homes.

Many states (CA, CO, CT, DC, IL, LA, ME, MS, NB, OR, TN, VA, WV) already recognize the powerful connections between child abuse and animal cruelty with mandatory or voluntary cross-reporting legislation. Agencies protecting animals shall or may report their suspicions of child abuse to organizations protecting children, and vice versa.

Right now, Ohio cross-reporting laws are puny. They require humane society officials (but neither dog wardens nor animal control officers) to report suspected child abuse.

HB 523 puts more eyes on the alert for hidden violence with mandatory cross-reporting by veterinarians, veterinary technicians, dog wardens, deputy dog wardens, animal control officers, employees of children's services, county departments of job and family services, licensed counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists.

With claims made in good faith the reporting individuals would be immune from civil and criminal liability.

Established research shows the powerful connections among interpersonal violence and animal abuse. In one study of homes with known physical abuse of children, animal abuse also occurred in 88% of those families. (DeViney, Dickert, & Lockwood, 1983)

71% of women with pets in homes of domestic violence reported their partners had threatened, harmed, or killed their companion animals. 32% of those mothers reported that their children had also hurt or killed their pets. (Ascione, 1998)

Animal cruelty is a warning sign that others too may be at risk. Violent offenders in maximum security are significantly more likely than nonviolent offenders to have committed animal cruelty as children. (Merz-Perez, Heide, and Silverman, 2001)

A current, Ohio case clearly illustrates the nasty web of child abuse and animal cruelty. Middletown police and Butler County Children Services were called to check on a home. After three dead dogs and one decapitated dog's head were found in the back yard, the mother was charged with three counts of felony animal cruelty.

A few days before her arrest, elementary school officials, concerned about the woman's three children, notified the police.

Police report said the residence had no edible food and the house was in "very much disarray and unlivable".

HB 523, Cross-reporting, offers early detection, and hopefully, prevention of rampant violence, unleashed against the most vulnerable among us, children and pets.

I strongly urge you to VOTE YES on HB 523, Cross-reporting of Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty, and to send this bill to the House floor for a vote.

Children pay a high price for witnessing or experiencing violence. Sometimes they pay their entire lives.

