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Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 319
September 20th, 2017
Before the House State & Local Government Committee

Chair Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of the House State & Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 319, which designates the Shelter Pet as the Official Pet of Ohio to raise awareness for shelter pets, shelter workers and shelter volunteers.

This issue first came to my attention while meeting with animal advocates and trying to brainstorm ways to decrease the shelter population for both humane and fiscal reasons. The humane and financial costs are unnecessarily high. Approximately 6.5 million animals enter shelters every year in the United States. Unfortunately, Ohio does not keep statistics on shelters or on the costs to maintain these shelters. It is estimated in Ohio that 30% of the animals that enter shelters in Ohio are euthanized; and that number is as high as 58% in some counties. While these euthanization numbers have decreased significantly from a few decades ago, there is still much work to be done to increase awareness about spaying, neutering and adoption.

This legislation has two objectives: first, to shine a bright spotlight on Ohio's shelters and the animals languishing within them and second, to call attention to the many workers and hundreds of volunteers who dedicate their lives to ensuring that our shelter pets are well cared for and adopted to loving homes. We also hope that as children study Ohio's state symbols, such as the buckeye tree, the trilobite, and *Hang on Sloopy* as well as other state symbols, they will appreciate the importance of the shelter pet as the state pet and consider adoption as their first option in obtaining a pet.

This legislation serves as a starting point from which we can examine the condition of shelter animals in Ohio and work to lower the numbers, and hopefully, one day, eliminate them. I hope you will join me and pass this legislation so that one day the shelter pet can go the way of the trilobite: Extinct in Ohio.

I look forward to working with each member of this committee to raise awareness for Ohio's shelter animals and will be happy to answer any questions you have.