



Ohio House Committee: State and Local Government
Proponent Testimony - Ohio House Bill 552

Teresa Landon

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Chairwoman Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of this Ohio House Committee: My name is Teresa Landon and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Ohio SPCA) and a resident of Pickaway County.

On behalf of the Ohio SPCA I am testifying in support of HB 552 which will 1) permit dog wardens to purchase, possess, and administer drugs for euthanizing animals and pre-euthanizing drugs for unconsciousness and 2) prohibit an animal shelter from destroying a domestic animal by the use of a carbon monoxide gas chamber, carbon dioxide gas chamber, or any other nonanesthetic inhalant.

The easiest and I believe the most effective way for me to justify support of HB 552 is to give a brief history of the Ohio SPCA's efforts to rid Ohio of gas chambers and ensure humane euthanasia by injection. In 2001, we started setting up a network of volunteer county coordinators in order to conduct community outreach and find out how we could help county shelters lower the number of animals being euthanized. However, what our county coordinators uncovered set us on a completely different path. With a nation entering the 21st century, the discoveries behind closed doors and behind county shelters were barbaric, shocking, and heartbreaking.

In one county we found a homemade gas box built into the wall. The box was full of webs because the dog warden had started shooting the dogs in the head behind the shelter. However, the stick used to beat back dogs already in the cement box while more dogs were loaded was still there. In another county shooting was the only method and 600 dogs a year met this fate behind an old barn where they were then buried in shallow graves. As we visited the site to gather evidence, we were literally walking on fur, collars, and bones sticking out of the ground. In numerous other counties we found homemade gas boxes inside and outside of shelters. One dog warden openly complained of headaches despite the use of a gas mask. Previously in this county, dead dogs were often left in the gas box and more dogs to be gassed simply shoved in on top of the bodies. Over 1600 dogs a year died in this homemade gas box. In more than one county, commercial gas chambers were found to have failed resulting in animals being put through more than one cycle when found to still be alive. Years ago, I personally took home an animal that survived the gas chamber because workers didn't have the heart to gas him again. In one county, the gas chamber door was found to be taped around the edges in order to prevent leakage of the gas. Crowding excessive numbers of dogs into the gas boxes and chambers and the absence of compartments has also taken place. To save money, one county placed dogs in metal boxes in the bed of a pick-up truck and then used the engine exhaust to kill them. Over the years, these discoveries along with witness testimony and undercover video obtained have confirmed that the euthanasia process for these animals was extremely cruel and merciless.



Most of what we have dealt with has centered around the use of homemade gas boxes and gas chambers. However, we have encountered two counties where intracardiac injection was used on dogs that were fully conscious. This is already prohibited by Ohio law. Necropsies showed injection sites in the lungs, diaphragm, and elsewhere. Death was a long painful process for these dogs. Circumstances in both counties indicated that the individuals involved were not only callous, but incompetent. However, when intracardiac injection is used, pre-euthanasia drugs must be available.

During the past 17 years, the Ohio SPCA has gone county to county uncovering and eliminating the horrific euthanasia taking place in shelters. Through direct intervention, cooperation with county officials, media exposure, public support, and three successful lawsuits the routine use of gunshot, engine exhaust, homemade gas boxes and commercial gas chambers, and any known improper administration of intracardiac injection has ended in over 25 Ohio counties. To our knowledge, there are only two existing animal gas chambers in shelters and the reason given for use by one shelter representative is the lack of access to a pre-euthanasia drug for aggressive dogs. The vast majority of county shelters do not have gas chambers. Allowing dog wardens to directly access and administer drugs for pre-euthanasia purposes will eliminate the barriers used to justify gas chambers for the last remaining counties.

I believe the history I have described justifies the changes outlined in HB 552 which will ensure that when animals must be euthanized their lives are ended humanely. The process must be carried out with compassion. Euthanizing shelter animals by carbon monoxide or carbon dioxide is inhumane to the animal and harmful to humans. Passage of this bill will allow Ohio to become a no-gassing state thus joining the majority of the nation. It will also provide dog wardens with much-needed pre-euthanasia drugs. Passage of HB 552 into law will prevent history from repeating itself.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of HB 552 and I thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today.

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