

Good morning,

Thank you for the opportunity to be here. I wish I wasn't here. I wish I didn't have to say what I am about to tell you. After almost five years, I still have not recovered from the ruthlessness of a local humane society that shattered my life. I am here, because I have to be. I am here because you need to know what is occurring at the hands of some of the organizations you have empowered and trusted to carry out a mission of serving the community and protecting animals. You need to know about the abuses of power at taxpayers' expense. You need to know the current system allows the furthering of individual agendas far from the original intent of organizations that perhaps you believed were ethical and trustworthy. You need to know that Ohio is becoming a hotbed of this type of activity. You need to know, animal owners are afraid.

I speak in support of HB 24. It wasn't too long ago, that I stood here as an animal lover and rescuer and testified supporting HB 310 for service dogs and their contribution to supporting those individuals with post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The committee did the right thing and passed that legislation. I am asking once again for you to do the right thing for animals and the citizens of Ohio. Having checks and balances and requirements will aid in prosecuting the criminals and exonerating the innocent. In both instances, the animals are protected. Only those that want to abuse the system and want no accountability will be against this necessary oversight.

Animal welfare and how to deal with the abundance of homeless animals is a very emotional subject. But there is unanimous agreement as to the need to prosecute and stop animal abusers. I too have no tolerance for animal cruelty or neglect. As you know, animal cruelty can now be prosecuted as a felony in our state. so we need to make sure that the true abusers are caught and punished and the innocent are protected against attacks by private organizations. It is a very serious concern to give so much power to private groups that the State has no jurisdiction over. We need to make sure the mission of these privately formed groups align with the objective as set forth by our Ohio Revised Code.

I want to share my story with you today. I have been helping neglected and abused animals for many years. I was registered as an animal rescue with the ODA, (Ohio Department of Agriculture). I followed all the rules and exceeded standards of care. Ironically, the ODA clearly states that animal rescues are not bound by care or caging standards. For over 14 years, I saved 100's of death row dogs from the shelter system. I worked with many shelters and partnered well with the local humane societies. I had many, many successful adoptions and did complete vetting, care, training and placement. In fact, I had worked with the shelter that attacked me when it was run by a different director. Under the new regime, the focus of this humane society changed drastically.

I say "had" because in May of 2014, my rescue animals and personal pets were seized by a privately run local humane society who was in deep financial trouble. I stand before you today, still an animal lover, no longer a rescuer but now a convicted animal abuser. Those are very difficult words for me to say, as that is not who I am. It is a false label that I will have to live with for the rest of my life. It is so contrary to my nature. This has affected my career, my health, my financial situation, my reputation, my mental health, every aspect of my life.

This unlawful seizure consisted of a false affidavit to obtain a warrant, no sheriff or veterinarian involvement, a manufactured prosecution claiming poor air quality (which was never measured and refuted by the fact of the presence of healthy birds) , and a burglar aligned with the local humane society. The desire to acquire highly adoptable dogs and financial gain were motive to rob me of my entire life savings shattering my life and destroying my rescue. A rescue that saved not only many animals, but also assisted the shelters and the community. My animals suffered not at my hands, but at the hands of the individuals who perpetrated the attack.

I support this bill as a start to implement oversight and accountability for those appointed to serve the State of Ohio as humane and cruelty officers. Had this been in existence in my case, the travesty that occurred would never have happened. I experienced firsthand, the abuse of power. I experienced a chain of events orchestrated by a private group in financial peril to ensure their monetary gain and promote their own agenda.

Rather than seen as an ally, rescues with high adoption rates are often viewed as competition by the governing local humane society and thought to take adoption fees away from them. Responsible breeders are viewed as adding to the pet population . This type of seizure and acquisition of animals and money is happening more and more frequently in Ohio and elsewhere. It has become part of the business model and a fund raising technique for some organizations to capitalize on, at the expense of innocent people. This is not to say all seizures are perpetrated on innocent people. However the tactics used, make it very hard for those not directly involved to distinguish the validity, again proving the need for oversight and training. Rescuing animals and even pet ownership is becoming a perilous act with this current system.

Many of us live in fear as we see what is happening. This is not isolated to me. The actions of these rogue groups dilute the effectiveness of our laws. The truly abused and neglected animals are often not helped if there is no monetary gain for the seizing organization. Preferred targets are those with highly adoptable animals and little to no expense. It is becoming such that the starving pit-bull at the end of a chain is no priority but a highly adoptable dog who is well cared for requires seizure.

Desirable targets are rescues, breeders and responsible pet owners who all vet their animals, especially those that have a higher volume of animals (more bond money assessed), have highly adoptable breeds and have assets/money. The organization seizes and then puts out urgent pleas for donations for the seized animals. The public has no way to know what is really happening. When the plea for money went out to assist my animals, they called me a hoarder despite knowing that I was a rescue with a steady rate of adoptions. The bond I was paying per month was not divulged and when the public went to volunteer and assist with walking the dogs, it was strictly forbidden for the animals to even be seen. Newspapers were placed covering the windows and doors were padlocked along with the kennels. It all seems legitimate, especially if the animals are hidden and impounded for no one to see. And no one to question

If the animals are surrendered or the owner is found guilty, the animals are then sold for additional monies as well as all the supplies seized from the owner. The owner is too humiliated, emotionally

traumatized and financially depleted. And with ruined reputations, the truth never surfaces. The animals are never seen again, the owner just wants to retreat and the perpetrators go without consequence. And with no oversight, this can continue.

The national Samoyed breeders association has a website in which the home page describes another illegitimate seizure right here in Ohio at the end of 2016. Take notice that their homepage has the tab, "Ohio seizure", no other state is listed, just Ohio. So rather than Ohio favorably ranking as tough on animal cruelty with the adoption of Goddard's law and bestiality laws, the flip side is this horrible growing problem of unlawful seizures which will continue to increase as they go unchecked. Do we want Ohio to be known for anti pet ownership or illegal seizures?

The statute defines neglect, lacking food, water, shelter and necessary medical care, but it also includes verbiage "any act or omission". This has become a "catch all" for anything. And if this can include anything, the unscrupulous humane agents will find anything or manipulate the live evidence to create the illusion of cruelty or neglect. A mat of hair behind the ear, a flea, a long toenail or air quality that smells like chlorine, any minor infraction not resulting in pain or suffering will be magnified and could be cause for someone to say the animal was suffering. What about a smoker who owns pets? We all know second hand smoke is bad. Is this repeated exposure, cruelty to animals? Would it not be poor air quality? Will smokers not be allowed to have pets? Sounds ridiculous, but this is a slippery slope. A senior dog with no teeth was evaluated in my seizure and it was determined that he should have a dental cleaning. How can this be happening? Because of no oversight, no accountability and lack of training.

Often these animals are immediately adopted out or held as evidence until trial. An animal that requires being seized should be in distress or obviously suffering and should not be available for adoption by the shelters with the next day/days. Seizure is done if there is no other remedy to leave the animal safely on site or if the owner is uncooperative. Pet owners should not serve as an inventory source for struggling shelters. The local organization has the option to leave the animal with the owner, citing any deficiencies and monitoring compliance. However, bond could not then be assessed and the animals may not be acquired by the organization. So no financial gain!

Many owners are forced to give up their animals because a bond for the care of the animals is levied. Most people cannot afford the amounts set. In my case it was \$17,400 per month. I paid that for 6 months, totally \$104,400. In fact, I was ordered to pay bond months before any charges were brought against me. I had 48 hours to come up with the \$17,400 in cash cash with the initial order or forfeit my animals. Who can do this? How is that justice? Where is due process? I even paid \$300 a month for care of my daughter's gecko who ate \$1.20 worth of crickets a week. My daughter's birds were also taken. The humane society charged \$300 a month for them as well. Even with the best parrot food, the cost is about \$30 per month. The birds were kept at the humane society in their garage. The fumes and gases present as well as temperature changes in a garage was absolutely unsafe and injurious to their health. My animals received very substandard care at the humane society and should never have been seized from the safety of my rescue. But they were stolen to bring money in to this failed organization under the guise of cruelty/neglect.

Another recent seizure by the same group was of a pet store, in which they had 800 feeder mice and 200 guinea pigs. The bond was set as \$10,000 PER DAY. The pet shop owner forfeited their animals. A woman in a diabetic coma was ordered to pay \$3,000 for a 5 day period while she was still in the hospital and her animals were seized. Unable to do so, the animals were killed or sent out. When threatening to sue, she was informed that she would be charged with neglect and abandonment if she pursued legal action. She is fighting to this day to get the surviving dogs returned. Without oversight, the seizing organization can name any amount of money wanted and if not paid, the owner loses their animals without a trial or if you are late with the monthly payment ordered, you lose the animals and all the money paid thus far. That was a real frightening concern for me as my money in my retirement account was running out, and my trial was delayed just a week before it was to start. The Prosecutor just happened to marry the VP of the local humane society board during that time and my trial was not rescheduled for another three months costing me \$52,200 in additional bond. With exorbitant bond, few can afford an attorney or mount a proper defense. The extortion of money became their main goal in my prosecution, as my animals started to deteriorate in the shelter. It was definitely not about the welfare of the animals. The money demanded for their care was not being used for their care, but held in trust. So they had my money in the bank, but my animals did not receive proper care. Some of my dogs lost 50% of their weight while caged for 8 months at the shelter. I had to get protection orders to protect my animals from the agency who was supposed to be protecting them. At one point, the shelter director made the false claim that three of my dogs were heartworm positive and needed to be killed. Of course, this was not true, and their desire to kill three healthy animals went public. With public outcry, the animals were spared and of course not heartworm positive which by the way is normally a treatable condition that I even offered to pay above and beyond the \$104,400. It is believed this false claim was to bolster their case against me.

I knew that I was dealing with very bad people. I knew I had to fight for the animals I loved. I knew this organization wasn't about the animals at all. I knew it would come out right in the end because I was innocent. But that did not happen.

If the owner is found not guilty on any or all of the animals, the seizing organization then claims that the bond money was needed to cover the costs of caring for the animals. The shelter can even hold animals, charge bond money and not file charges on them. Even if the shelter loses their case, they get to keep the windfall of money for care of the animals. In addition, sanctions may be put on the owner so they are not allowed to even get their animals back in which they were not convicted on. So surrender or pay becomes the end result no matter what. If you fight, you just pay more. And the animals suffer at the humane society while being held for months on end. Personally, the owner is drug through hell.

For any of you who own animals or know someone who does. What would you do if an organization breaks into your home, takes your animals, hides them from everyone and begins the process of demanding an exorbitant amount of money, (not to get them back), but just to retain ownership until you endure a criminal trial many months down the road?

As painful as this is, I would like you to see the pictures of my actual seizure. Pictures which were taken under repeated threat of arrest. The pictures do not show hurt, neglected, sick or dirty animals. They do not show the sinister sequence and planned events leading to this day. They do not show the result of this disaster.

My animals were placed in the hot sun for almost 5 hours with no food or water, not able to relieve themselves outside as trained to do. Nor could I comfort them or touch the "evidence". My home was physically destroyed and labeled a crime scene so I was not allowed in. All I could hear was crashing items and barking as myself, my neighbor and a volunteer were locked outside the door in total disbelief. My home was now invaded with many humane officers from two counties in my once, beautiful, safe home. The animals were then loaded on a one axle trailer with only bungee cords holding the crates as they were driven 13 miles at highway speeds. You can imagine their condition upon arrival at the shelter. Others were closed in a van for many hours stacked on top of one another.

I believe these public servants have the obligation and duty to conduct themselves ethically and professionally. When proper procedures are not followed, the result can be anything and tragedies like mine occur. A shelter director with no companion animal experience, no shelter experience, no law enforcement training but who has experience in fund raising and is seeking a career in which the objective is to accomplish "first ever" projects and tasks is not a good fit to direct a seizure of someone's treasured pets and legal prosecution of that individual. Records show that I was the only seizure in which bond was charged prior to trial and even after conviction in most cases, little to no retribution was made for care of the animals. I was the "first ever project" with a lasting disastrous effect.

That brings me to the next aspect of this bill. Training, necessary training. I hold here, the National Animal Control Guidelines. It serves as a training manual for animal control. It identifies a Code of Ethics and I quote "First, we must earn and maintain the respect and the confidence of the people we serve. These things take years to earn, yet can be lost in one moment of dishonest or derelict conduct." The State of Ohio gives these individuals badges, authority to arrest people and seize property. Yet there is no control by the state or county. Governance is only by a private board of directors.

There is an entire section for cruelty investigations and seizures. I was not familiar with this until after my seizure and I now know what should have been done. There is a process necessary to properly determine cruelty, effectively document and insure successful prosecution in the circumstance that cruelty or neglect is present. Without oversight, no one was held accountable to insure that an investigation and seizure was even warranted in the first place.

Other sources of approved training include the American Humane Society training for animal welfare specialists and the Society of Animal Welfare Association training.

Evidence such as live animals, changes as it is never the same as at the time of the seizure. Once the animal is removed, stressed by transport and the handling by strangers, physical changes take place. Breathing and heart rate increases, digestive upset by the change in diet can cause diarrhea or vomiting. Standing on concrete can cause sore and swollen paw pads. Feces, urine or vomit from transport may

soil their coats. Wind in their faces may cause nasal or eye discharge. Conditions can and do develop just from seizing the animals which may not have been present on site. Yet without proper documentation and pictures taken 360 degrees around each animal on site at the time of the seizure, this “evidence “ can be falsely used against the owner. With all these changes, my animals experienced, they required no vet care at the time of seizure and in fact many of the animals were not seen by a vet until 9 days later. So why were they seized?

Without training and accountability, staged scenarios are created by unscrupulous agents.

Pictures need to be taken of the seizure site upon arrival before being disturbed by any humane agents. Food, supplies, water, housing must be inspected as well as photographed. Questions need to be asked regarding how long the animal has been there and what vetting has been done. This is especially important for rescues, sanctuaries and rehabilitators as we often took in sick or injured animals. In fact there should be an investigation for any complaint received. In my case, no investigation was ever done, no questions asked just an instant warrant when a burglar reported a smell like chlorine and skunk. I assure you that I use bleach to clean and have skunks on a 44 acre rural property in early May. 139 pages of vet records, numerous Petfinder records, as well as rescue files, adoption contracts, testimonials, receipts and rescue records exceeding \$22,000 for food and vetting for that year did not matter. An 80 foot agility course, a pond for dogs who like to swim and walking paths that adopters would meet and visit and see if the dog would be a good family member were intentionally not seen by the humane agents. No food, leashes, collars, brushes, shampoo, first aid kits and medicines were seen or photographed either despite their prominence. Healthy animals did not matter. Evidence of innocence was not allowed. In fact my excellent track record of working with and all my files of having good inspections and saving dogs from this shelter disappeared with the new shelter director under his regime. No oversight, no accountability and lack of a standard process resulted in this cruelty perpetrated by those empowered to do so. Healthy animals did not matter, except for the purpose of gain by the seizing organization.

Individual rights were trampled upon and a life’s savings wiped out. My passion for animals and my mission to rescue has only been overshadowed by my desire to expose the dangerous scheme occurring.

Without training, the process is defective at best. Without oversight, the process can be deceptive and destructive at its worst.

You cannot see the damage done in these pictures. I fought for my animals, I fought for the truth, and I now fight so this cannot happen to anyone else. Please know that all animal owners are potential targets. What happened to me, can happen to anyone. Please know that we need your help as I respectfully ask that you pass HB 24 and further implement laws to protect animals and the people who love them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.