

Chair Koehler, Vice Chair Smith, Ranking Member Brent and Members of the House Agriculture Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak today as an interested party on House Bill 24. My name is Lori Ringhiser-Carlson. I am the Executive Director of the Licking County Humane Society and my organization has been serving animals and their people in Licking County for 53 years. Our mission is to improve the lives of animals and people through advocacy, education, and support. In 2018, we had intakes totaling 2065 animals and had operational expenses of \$879,454. We also provide many other services to the community including low cost spay/neuter/vaccine clinics, a pet food pantry, pet respite care to ill seniors, visits to local nursing homes and we provide all the pet food for the Meals on Wheels recipients of Licking County to ensure they do not give their own food to their pets.

My organization was formed under Ohio Revised Code 1717. As such, we currently employ humane agents to investigate animal cruelty cases in our unincorporated areas and many of the municipalities within the county. A point of distinction here is that not all local humane societies elect to exercise their legal authority to perform this service. In some counties, the enforcement responsibility has been defaulted to local law enforcement and the sheltering responsibility for impounded animals to the county or local animal control facility. It is of the utmost importance to recognize that in counties where humane societies are providing these law enforcement services, they are saving their county significant financial resources.

For example, in Licking County, we received 503 referrals alleging animal cruelty in 2018. 368 of those cases were opened for investigation. The vast majority of investigations do not result in confiscation. Humane agents educate owners on the law, provide resources to eliminate the concerns and do rechecks to ensure that owners have made the necessary changes to secure the safety of the animal and come into compliance with the law. Out of those investigations, 387 animals were confiscated in 2018 with approximately one third of them coming in from hoarding or other multiple animal cases. These confiscations included abandoned animals, abused animals, and neglected animals, primarily cats and dogs. Some of these 387 confiscated animals were obtained under a search warrant, some were confiscated due to probable cause and many were a field surrender to the agent because the owner no longer was able or willing to care for the pet. Our per animal cost in 2018 was \$425, so for the 387 animals entering our care, the total cost was \$164,475. However, the truth is that confiscated animals have longer lengths of stay due to the need for rehabilitation prior to adoption, so that number is likely greater.

In my county, we are very fortunate because the county commissioners understand that my organization can provide this service at a lower cost than they can. They also do not have the infrastructure to care for these animals, especially if they must be held as evidence for a drawn-out prosecution process or if they are cats. The local animal control facility does not serve cats. Therefore, they contribute to funding for one of my humane agent's salaries (\$20,000) and provide an additional \$20,000 per year for the cost of animal care. Each jurisdiction we serve is also contributing to the cost of the services we provide, but at a much lower level. Even with these contributions, LCHS

was responsible for a \$125,000 price tag for the humane agent program in 2018. Adoption fees and restitution do not come close to narrowing this gap.

Most county humane societies do not receive anywhere close to this level of funding from their county or local governments. This is an example of a private/public partnership which is saving tax payer dollars as well as serving victims of animal cruelty. And although I appreciate that the monthly compensation has been raised in the proposed bill, it is still not possible to employ a humane agent for \$125 per month. Many humane societies in Ohio are helping the State of Ohio manage an enforcement issue that Ohioans feel strongly about. I think we have all seen what can happen when citizens become outraged over animal cruelty. I for one, would welcome a tone change about local humane societies as organizations that are making a difference for their communities and saving them time and money by doing so and not as organizations that are attempting to violate civil rights and extort money from innocent victims.

Judicial oversight of non-prosecution agreements should be applied to all law enforcement entities that are confiscating animals and to all those prosecuting cases under ORC 959, whether appointed or public. It is important that any oversight be applied consistently across the board. Likewise, the annual enforcement report to the county sheriff seems somewhat unreasonable. While I do not object to transparency and commonsense oversight, this seems to accomplish neither. I am not aware that other law enforcement entities must provide this type of report to the county sheriff and quite frankly, the county sheriff has no administrative authority over humane societies. This seems to create an unfair burden on humane societies with no sustentative benefit.

In closing, I would like to share that I am the President of the Board for the Ohio Animal Welfare Federation, formerly Ohio Federated Humane Societies. Our membership now includes animal welfare professionals from local county animal shelters and private rescues, as well as local humane societies. OFED provides statewide training to animal welfare organizations and individuals on many topics. I feel confident in saying that should HB24 become law, OFED would be willing to provide training to assist in implementing the changes.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

Lori Carlson, MPA
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Licking County Humane Society