

June 19, 2019

RE: Proponent testimony for House Bill 33

Chair Lang, Vice Chair Plummer and members of the committee,

The undersigned stakeholders wish to express support for the passage of House Bill 33 which would expand cross-reporting requirements between human and animal welfare systems. Together, we represent the overlapping and intersecting systems currently tasked with maintaining the safety and welfare of vulnerable Ohioans - children, older adults, and people with disabilities- and we appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony for this important bill. House Bill 33 is informed by evidence of a significant link between animal and human abuse and aligned with best practices for coordination between welfare systems.

There is compelling historical and recent evidence of a link between animal abuse and other forms of abuse. In fact, the very first legal case of child abuse was investigated through the only available welfare investigation infrastructure: the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animal (ASPCA). Researchers have continued to find significant correlations between animal abuse, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, elder abuse and other forms of violence.<sup>1</sup>

Our collective membership (social workers, counselors, child welfare and adult protective service caseworkers and administrators) can offer numerous examples to illustrate the ways that animal abuse and neglect connect to our work. Children are sometimes quicker to volunteer concern about the abuse of their pet than abuse they have experienced directly. Older adults may avoid seeking medical attention for fear that they will be placed in a nursing facility and not allowed to return to home to their pet. A malnourished dog in the yard may be the first visible sign that a caretaker is unable to meet the basic needs of a household. Though the link is clear to many, the practice reality is that our systems often operate in silos with limited communication *even when working with the same family*.

HB 33 will increase communication between investigators and welfare professionals, which in turn will keep more Ohioans safer. We hope that you will consider passage of House Bill 33.

Sincerely,

*Organizational Support*

National Association of Social Workers, Ohio Chapter

Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services

Ohio Counseling Association

Ohio School Social Work Association

The University of Toledo Social Work Program

*Individual Support*

Aviva Vincent, PhD, LMSW - Veterinary Social Work Faculty & Chair of NASW Ohio's Committee on Human-Animal Interaction

Janet Hoy-Gerlach LISW-S, PhD, Associate Professor of Social Work, University of Toledo Social Work Program & Chair of NASW Ohio's Committee on Human-Animal Interaction

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<sup>1</sup> Link Coalition, <http://nationallinkcoalition.org/>