

House Bill 350 Proponent Testimony
Barry Sheets, Legislative Consultant Citizens for Community Values
House Criminal Justice Committee
February 26, 2020

Chairman Lang, Vice-Chairman Plummer, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for continuing hearings today on House Bill 350, a measure that seeks to correct a significant omission in Ohio's enforcement of an important law.

I am Barry Sheets, legislative liaison for Citizens for Community Values, Ohio's statewide Family Policy Council, associated with Focus on the Family, Family Research Council, and the Alliance Defending Freedom. Our organization has mainly focused on the harms of pornography, sexually-oriented businesses, and material harmful to children over our 33 years of service to Ohio.

It is from this perspective that we applaud the efforts of sponsor Representative Jim Hoops to correct an error by Ohio's Sixth District Court of Appeals in striking in a blanket fashion the provisions of Senate Bill 331 of the 131st General Assembly. That ruling left eight northwestern Ohio counties without the ability to address the crimes of individuals engaging in particular animal cruelty practices, specifically cockfighting and more disturbingly, bestiality.

Until the law was put into effect with SB 331, human/animal sexual conduct, otherwise known as the practice of bestiality, was a growing problem in Ohio. This practice is recognized as abnormal or deviant behavior in the psychological literature (*Zoophilia/Bestiality – engaging in sexual activity with animals* (p. 576) in “Paraphilias,” *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision* (Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), pp. 566-582). It is described as a sexual paraphilia, which is a condition characterized by abnormal sexual desires, typically involving extreme or dangerous activities.

The National District Attorneys Association has recognized a significant, documented link between this crime against animals and further crimes against people, specifically linked to crimes against children including child sexual assault, domestic violence, and the making of child or animal pornography. The NDAA also found that a number of offenders in this last category often force both child and adult victims to engage in bestiality.

Previous law enforcement testimony showed that Ohio was becoming a magnet for those engaging in offering animals for sexual abuse, or those who are seeking a sexual outlet via inter-species sexual conduct. I am sure that we can all agree that this practice is not something that we want to see continue to have a safe harbor, which is what the Sixth District ruling has created. Engage in these practices in Franklin, Butler, Montgomery or 77 other Ohio counties and you go to jail. Under the court's decision, engage in these same practices in Lucas, Erie, Fulton, Huron, Ottawa, Sandusky, Williams or Wood counties, and face no consequences.

Our organization asks you to, without further delay, adopt the provisions of House Bill 350 and once and for all clarify that Ohio stands to protect animals and citizens in our communities by banning these aberrant practices in every corner of our great state. Thank you for your kind attention to this request, and I would be happy to take any questions of the committee.