



# Animal Welfare Institute

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## TESTIMONY ON OHIO H.B. 305

Presented by Vicki Deisner, Animal Welfare Institute  
Before the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee  
Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Chairman Lang, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Minority Member Leland, and distinguished members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, I am Vicki Deisner, Government Affairs representative for the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) in Ohio, and on behalf of AWI, and our thousands of members and constituents in Ohio, we ask that your committee support H.B. 305 and reinstate bestiality and felony cruelty laws statewide in Ohio.

### Bestiality

Bestiality is illegal in most countries, most states of the U.S., and in most areas of Ohio. Bestiality was passed in 2016 in Ohio as part of the Petland bill and should be reinstated statewide.

There are some who contend that bestiality is not a “violent” crime. Nothing could be further from the truth. Not only is bestiality abhorrent and cruel, often resulting in serious injury to or the death of the animal; it is also a red flag for the likelihood of violence against individuals. In fact, bestiality has come to be referred to as “animal sexual assault” or “interspecies sexual assault” because of its resemblance to human sexual assault in that it involves pain, coercion, and lack of consent. Moreover, offenders have more in common with pedophiles and rapists than with animal abusers, and there is a strong relationship to interpersonal violence. With regard to the latter, research has found some very disturbing trends, including:

- Children who engage in animal sexual assault were found to be more likely to commit crimes of interpersonal violence. In fact, animal sexual assault experienced in childhood was found to be the single strongest risk factor for future involvement in child sexual abuse.
- 37 percent of sexually violent juvenile offenders had sexually abused animals.
- 95 percent of juveniles who had reported engaging in animal sexual assault had also sexually assaulted individuals.
- In one jurisdiction in Virginia, of ten adult males convicted of crimes related to bestiality, eight had also been involved in crimes involving children (e.g., child pornography, soliciting sex from a minor).

Animal sexual assault is not the rare, isolated perversion people like to think it is. The explosion of the internet both facilitates this crime and allows it to flourish by allowing and encouraging perpetrators to communicate with and seek out one another, find animals for sexual purposes, and share their encounters.

## Felony Cockfighting

In a cockfight, specially bred roosters are fitted with knives, razorblades, or ice-pick-like instruments called gaffs, strapped to their heels and are encouraged to kill each other. The birds are placed into a pit and forced to fight to the death for the entertainment and gambling desires of the spectators. They cannot escape from the fight, regardless of how exhausted or injured they become. Common injuries include punctured lungs, broken bones, and pierced eyes. This is clearly deliberate animal cruelty.

Cockfighting is also closely connected to other crimes such as gambling, illegal drug and weapon distribution, acts of violence, and other gang activity. Law enforcement officials in many states find that busting an animal fighting operation is worth their time and efforts because they may find so many people who are committing other violations while at the fights or are already wanted for other crimes.

Despite its brutal nature, cockfighting is frequently a family affair—putting young children at risk to desensitization to violence toward both animals and people, and at risk to injury caused by the fighting roosters or other spectators. This also makes these children aware that flaunting the law is acceptable behavior.

Closing down a cockfighting operation often requires extensive undercover work, many staff hours, and great secrecy. Our law enforcement officials often cannot devote the necessary time to a criminal activity that is a mere misdemeanor offense. In order to prevent unnecessary cruelty and protect our communities, we need penalties strong enough to offset the gain from participating in cockfighting. Because cockfighting is an extremely lucrative crime, the fact that appellate district six in Ohio only has misdemeanor penalties for cockfighting—fines of, at most, \$250—would be considered by these criminals as “the cost of doing business” - hardly the kind of deterrence needed to end this cruel blood sport. And appellate district six is on the border of Michigan and Indiana – attracting cockfighters from these states.

Passage of H.B. 305 will add immeasurably to Ohio’s ability to protect both animals and its communities from sexually violent offenders and cockfighters statewide, and AWI hopes that the Ohio legislature will act on it swiftly. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.