



**Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
House Bill 24 – Interested Party Testimony**

Sharon Harvey, President and CEO

September 22, 2020

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member O'Brien, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 24 today. My name is Sharon Harvey and I'm the President & CEO of the Cleveland Animal Protective League, which is the humane society for Cuyahoga County and one of the largest animal shelters in Ohio. We are a private, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization organized under Ohio Revised Code 1717, and as such, are also authorized to appoint humane agents who enforce Ohio's animal protection laws.

The value that humane societies in Ohio bring to our communities cannot be overstated. Last year, the Cleveland APL assisted more than 13,000 animals through an array of lifesaving programs. For example, our animal sheltering program through which we provide care, treatment, and shelter to animals that have been surrendered by their owners, stray cats that were brought in by Good Samaritans, or animals that were victims of cruelty and were brought in by our humane law enforcement team, our adoption program through which we find them new homes, our spay and neuter program that is helping to reduce community pet overpopulation, our "safety net" programs that assist lower income pet owners and provide resources that will keep pets with the people they love, and our transfer program through which we bring in hundreds of animals from other over-crowded, underserved shelters for adoption. All of the services described are provided with no state or local funding - our organization is completely supported by philanthropic giving and fees for some of our services.

However, the aspect of our work I haven't mentioned, yet, and that sets us apart from other animal shelters and rescue organizations, is the authority granted to humane societies organized under Ohio Revised Code 1717, which enables us to enforce Revised Code 959, Ohio's animal protection laws. It is this part of our work that was the impetus for House Bill 24 and remains its primary focus.

Last year, nearly 6,800 animals were admitted to our shelter. Of those, just over 1,900 came in through our humane law enforcement team. Many were abandoned or voluntarily surrendered by their owners. Whenever possible, our first step is to provide education to owners about requirements for humane animal care and treatment under the law and then monitor them for compliance. However, there were 138 cases involving 1,052 animals that had to be impounded and required a probable cause hearing under ORC 959.132. A handful of these cases involved large numbers of cats from hoarding situations and one case involving more than 130 parakeets. It suffices to say that bringing in large numbers of animals in one day stretches our resources to the limit.

As you might imagine, animals from humane cases often require longer lengths of stay and more complex, expensive care and treatment than animals coming to us from other sources. For the 1,962 animals that came into our shelter last year through our humane law enforcement team, the total cost of care was nearly \$1.2

million. The cost of operating our humane investigations department alone, without including any costs associated with animal care, was nearly \$350,000. All of these expenses were paid for by donations to our organization.

Over the past six years of working on numerous iterations of this bill, it has become apparent that there is a lack of awareness about the role of humane societies and an associated lack of appreciation for the value our organizations provide at little or no cost to the state and local governments. Sadly, animal cruelty will always exist, however, without the existence of humane societies, costs for humane law enforcement and related animal care and services will have to be assumed by counties. For Cuyahoga County, assuming provision of a comparable standard of care and lifesaving, that cost would amount to at least the numbers already shared.

House Bill 24 makes numerous administrative changes to ORC Section 1717 governing humane societies and humane agents, including removal of outdated language referencing humane society's authority to investigate cases of cruelty to children. It also removes all references to the Ohio Humane Society, which is no longer a functioning animal welfare organization. The Cleveland APL supports these changes.

While we feel several of the provisions in this bill dealing with the creation of reports and additional procedural requirements are unnecessary, we appreciate the bill sponsor's willingness to address the majority of our objections to previous versions of this legislation over the past three General Assemblies. These compromises have moved us from being opponents of the bill to an interested party.

I understand there may be amendments offered today, but as of my submission of this testimony we have not confirmed which versions will be offered, so I will reserve my feedback on them until my verbal testimony is provided.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony today.