

**TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF HB 267
NOVEMBER 17, 2015
2:00 P.M.
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

It is a privilege to express my support today for HB 267, “Trooper’s Law.” I am Rev. Robert Sholis, an ordained minister in The United Methodist Church. For the past fifteen years I have served as a senior pastor at Methodist churches in Licking, Fayette and Franklin Counties. Not only do I consider myself part of the broad-based and growing movement in the state in support of this proposed legislation, my presence also reflects, I believe, an increased understanding within the Christian community, including many evangelicals, of the connection of our faith witness and the biblical mandate for our care of all God’s creation, including animal life. Such groups as the Evangelical Environmental Network, Earth Ministry.Org, Web of Creation and constituency groups within the National Council of Churches and National Association of Evangelicals reflect this growing trend.

There is ample justification in scripture for this proposed legislation, which would end the unnecessary and cruel execution of orphaned and injured fawns and permanently injured and tame deer, would establish rehabilitation sanctuaries under the law and provide legal protection for rescuers, rehabilitators and veterinarians who care for these animals.

Regarding scripture, following the account of the flood, in the Book of Genesis Chapter 9 God not only announces a new covenant of protection and concern between God and Noah and his descendents, but also between God and every animal of the earth. Further, Jesus’ command in the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 25 guides us in our Christian faith to care for “the least of these,” among whom the innocent creatures who would be protected by this legislation could certainly be included. Earlier, in Matthew Chapter 5 in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, we hear the Beatitude that, “Blessed are the

merciful, for they will receive mercy.” In the first chapter of the Letter to the Colossians, we read that all things on earth have been created *through* Christ and *for* Christ, which would connote the sacredness and value of animal life beyond simply its utility to humans.

Similar to other Christian denominations, the United Methodist Book of Discipline contains a number of formally adopted denominational social principles mandating the compassionate treatment of animals. Also, Dr. Martin Luther King often expressed his belief in the interconnectedness of all life, and that what affected others adversely diminished us as well.

While I speak from the Christian tradition, it is also true that virtually all the major world religions have also long shared a concern for the humane treatment of animals as part of their own traditions.

Scriptural texts which would seem to support the compassionate consideration of the animals to be affected by this proposed legislation are not limited to the citations I have mentioned. However, in addition I would submit many other logical reasons in support of this proposed bill. There seem to be no demonstrable arguments that weigh against its passage. No significant impact of an adverse nature on deer population has been suggested. I also understand that no direct financial support from the State of Ohio is entailed in this legislation.

On the other hand, passage of this legislation would, I believe, appeal to our finest human impulses of extending mercy and compassion to, and alleviating suffering of, these innocent, helpless and weak creatures. No longer would human compassion extended to them be held to be against the law. Passage would allow such professionals as veterinarians to perform the clinical duties for which they have been

trained. The current situation, which ties the hands of veterinarians who are trained to treat and alleviate animal suffering, would no longer exist.

When I first heard the story of Carol Deyo and Trooper several years ago, I was immediately struck by the eminent logic, fairness and justice of her call to restore legal deer rehabilitation in our state to protect Trooper and those like him. I have been appalled that the official position of the ODNR has been to execute in an arbitrary, unnecessary and cruel manner these animals who otherwise could be saved. I am thankful for the negotiated settlement in which the department agreed not to kill Trooper. But such results should be the rule rather than the exception, and should not require the compassionate citizens of this state who wish to protect Trooper and his kind to go through the kind of duress Carol experienced near the end of her life and at such a great personal cost. We will honor her memory and bring justice to her cause by approving this legislation.

In a world of increasing violence, we need more than ever to honor the human impulse toward kindness and compassion where we can. Rather than have a default position of executing animals such as Trooper, we need to make a greater effort to *co-exist* with those animals for whom rehabilitation and sanctuary would be an available option under the proposed law.

I urge passage of HB 267.