

Ohio Companion Animal Torture Bill HB60 Goddard's Law

Thank you to all committee members, chairman, Hite, vice chair Hackett, Ranking member Gentile and to everyone present today allowing me the opportunity and privilege to come before this respected body to express my opinion concerning animal abuse and specifically the merits of H.B. 60, Goddard's Law.

I feel right at home here in Columbus, as I have spent many years attending the annual Ohio School Boards Association conferences while serving on the Berea Board of Education during the decade of the 90's. Additionally, visiting my daughter as she attended and graduated from Ohio State University. Wonderful town, great people!

My name is Carl Burgio. During the decade of the 90's, as I mentioned, I served as a member of the Berea Board of Education and also as vice president of Polaris Career Center during those same years. In 1999 I was then elected to serve as councilman at large in the city of Brook Park. I am now in my seventeenth year in that capacity. I mention this because I understand the gravity and careful consideration that is needed to examine any and all proposed legislation that comes before us as elected officials. You and I know the importance of making good decisions for those we represent. You take that seriously. I applaud that, and all you have done while serving. Not an easy job.

I have long been a proponent of stronger enforced laws to better protect our companion animals specifically as HB 60 will do. I do not claim to have the depth of knowledge of many in this chamber. I am grateful for those that do, and for the dedication and determination of those like Dick Goddard who have spent a lifetime promoting animal welfare issues, and of course Representative Bill Patmon, sponsor of H.B. 60, who serves and represents the citizens of Cleveland, the town I grew up in, and worked in the Department of Public safety for over thirty years, and representative David Hall co-sponsor of the bill, and the many thousands of other advocates including those in this very place today striving to make a profound difference for the lives of the animals HB 60 will help protect. I do share their concern deeply and also the love and compassion for companion animals.

There is no doubt about it. The residents of Brook Park whom I serve, and 65% of U.S. households, including mine, grew up with at least one pet that was considered a member of the family. Yes, pet owners in my community would agree that our dogs and cats contribute so much to our quality of life, and happiness, and yet expect so little in return. Just the essentials like wholesome nutritious food, water, shelter, and veterinary care as is necessary, and to be treated humanely.

Sadly, that isn't always the case. Not only is there often gross neglect, but we are all too familiar with reports of intentional acts of animal abuse, torture, and various other crimes of animal abuse. When my constituents learn that in 46 states it is a felony to abuse companion animals, but in Ohio it is a misdemeanor they are outraged and ask how can that be?

Currently most animal abuse cases in Ohio are first degree misdemeanors punishable with little or no jail time. If passed, HB 60 will require a fifth degree felony charge with 6-12 months jail, and up to a \$2500 fine instead of the misdemeanor charge. We've all seen instances of horrendous animal abuse as stated previously in the news and on the internet. I won't expound on that and give details that have all become too common, except one where recently an Ohio man who kept his German Shepherd tied to a tree for four years until authorities were called in and rescued the dog. The man was charged with a \$25 fine. Our laws need to be improved upon and updated to deal effectively with the huge problem of animal abuse in our state.

That is why in 2013, I introduced a resolution on city council in support of H.B. 274, the first Goddard's law legislation. I was proud that our city council unanimously passed that resolution. Unfortunately, it failed to come before a vote in the senate. Not to be deterred, I introduced another resolution in support of H.B. 60 which was also passed unanimously once again. The people of Brook Park are hoping to see this much needed change in our animal abuse laws become a reality.

A study by Northwest University revealed that animal abusers are five times more likely to commit violent crimes among people! Similarly, Frank R. Ascione, a professor at the University of Denver, who has extensively studied the topic of animal abuse said, "the research is pretty clear that there are connections between animal abuse and domestic violence and child abuse." Although we are aware of the high profile cases such as NFL star Michael Vick's interstate dog fighting operation in 2007, the Humane Society claims that the shocking number of animal abuse cases reported, only "represent the tip of the iceberg." August 31, 2015.

I would be remiss if I didn't add that many changes have been made like the National Incident-based Reporting System which is a comprehensive accounting of crime occurring in a law enforcement's jurisdiction. At the request of the National Sheriff's Association, and the animal welfare Institute, an animal cruelty offense category will be added to the NIBRS and will include four separate types of abuse. On January 1, 2016 the Federal Bureau of Investigation began to collect data on these four new areas of animal abuse.

There are so many possible improvements that can become a reality like greater protection for our K-9 police dogs and increasing the penalty for killing a K-9 police officer here in the state of Ohio as the federally employed K-9's are protected.

Previously, eight felony cruelty bills have died in Columbus in recent years. Lets work together in a bi-partisan manner to make Ohio and its residents proud by passing this thoughtful well crafted bill to protect the very things we hold dear, our companion animals. My thanks to representative Patmon, and Hall for sponsoring HB 60, and Dick Goddard for all of his efforts as well, to make Ohio a pet friendly state. I'll close by quoting Mr. Patmon who said, "to take care of animals and become a good, friendly animal state. "I think that is what will happen when this is over. Thank you for the time given to me and for listening.

Sincerely,

Carl Burgio
Councilman at Large
Brook Park