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March 13, 2018

Rep. Timothy E. Ginter, Chair and Honorable Members
House Community and Family Advancement Committee
The Ohio State House
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: VETERINARY SUPPORT for House Bill 523 (sponsors Rep. Lanese/Rep. Perales), establishing animal abuse reporting requirements for veterinary professionals in Ohio

Chair Ginter and Honorable Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA) to express our support for the proposed legislation, H.B. 523, requiring that veterinary professionals report suspected animal abuse in Ohio. If enacted, the law would also grant immunity from civil and criminal liability to those individuals reporting in good faith to the appropriate law enforcement or animal control agencies.

HSVMA is a nationwide association of approximately 9,000 veterinary professionals—including more than 300 Ohio members—with a focus on the health and welfare of all animals, including companion animal pets.

There are many reasons why veterinarians should be involved with recognizing and reporting animal cruelty and abuse:

- (1) **Legal responsibility.** There has been an explosion of legislation regarding animal abuse nationwide. In many states, including Ohio, animal cruelty is a felony crime, and society is increasingly acknowledging a need for mandating reporting of animal cruelty by the veterinary medical and other professions.
- (2) **Professional responsibility.** Many professional groups encourage veterinarians, as part of their professional responsibilities, to report animal abuse. These include the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)¹, the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)² and our organization, the HSVMA³.
- (3) **Ethical responsibility.** Animals deserve freedom from pain and violence in their own right, and veterinarians have an ethical responsibility to try to end animal suffering. The Veterinarian's Oath calls on veterinarians to work for "the prevention and relief of animal suffering."
- (4) **Community responsibility.** The link between animal abuse and violent human behavior is well established, and veterinarians have a community responsibility to help protect animal health and welfare and to help end animal abuse—and by doing so, possibly human abuse, as well—within their clients' families and the greater community at large.

Tragically, most veterinarians have encountered victims of suspected animal abuse in their clinics or other practice settings. It is important that veterinary professionals have the legal mandate to report this suspected abuse and that they receive immunity for doing so.

This will help eliminate reservations regarding reporting and provide the necessary legal protections for veterinarians who do report. HSVMA concurs with the civil and criminal immunity provisions granted under this amendment. However, we also support amending failure-to-report penalties to either civil or professional licensing penalties, rather than criminal penalties.

It is also important to stress that—should this legislation pass --many of the reports that would be made to law enforcement will not engender punishment. Seizure will occur only in the rare instances when an animal's owner refuses to accept help for a severely neglected animal or when an animal has been severely and deliberately abused.

We encourage members of the Committee, and all members of the Ohio Legislature, to support this critical humane legislation. In doing so, you will be protecting the animals--and the people--of the Buckeye State from acts of cruelty and abuse.

Thank you for your time and your leadership on behalf of animals.

Sincerely,



Barbara Hodges, DVM, MBA
HSVMA Veterinary Advisor

¹ American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Policy on Animal Abuse and Neglect:
<https://www.avma.org/kb/resources/reference/animalwelfare/pages/animal-abuse-resources-for-veterinarians.aspx>

² American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) Animal Abuse Reporting Position Statement:
<https://www.aahanet.org/Library/AnimalAbuseRpt.aspx>

³ Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA) Policy Statement on The Veterinarian's Role in Reporting Animal Cruelty: http://www.hsvma.org/policy_statements#animalcruelty