March 13, 2018

Re: HB 523

To whom it may concern:

Ohio is on the cusp of taking care of its most vulnerable constituents! HB 523 is a prime example of how, collectively, we can work across multiple venues to more effectively address the impact of violence and abuse on the child’s developing brain. The Adverse Childhood Experiences studies (ACE) have documented for the medical community that there are lifelong health consequences related to stress that is “toxic”, overwhelming and unremitting. Violence, abuse and loss are the hallmarks of children‘s experiences when reared in such settings. From birth to age 7, their bodies are flooded with stress hormones that destroy brain cells, decrease immunity to diseases and create school and social failures.

We must identify our “at risk” children and families as early as we can. Companion animals share the same environment as the children. The behavior that harms the animal is the same behavior that harms the human. Requiring professionals to immediately report suspected abuse of a companion animal or horse is a life-saving step toward using cross-reporting to assure that we are taking care of our most vulnerable assets. Imagine an Ohio where veterinarians and veterinary technicians, employees of children’s services agencies and county departments of job and family service with responsibility for protective services and licensed counselors, social workers and marriage and family therapists are able to share concerns about treatment of family animals and be immune from civil and criminal liability. Imagine dog wardens, who have access to homes where animals are mistreated, reporting suspected family violence and child abuse.

Currently, Ohio law requires only humane society officials, but not dog wardens nor animal control officers, to report suspected child abuse. That is our only cross-reporting mandate. We do not even have universal mandated reporting of child or elder abuse as exists in numerous other states.

How can Ohio lose by having more professionals invested in the well-being of humans by also investing in the well-being of their companion animals? We can’t lose – we can only gain! I urge unanimous support of this bill.

Sincerely,

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