



Written Testimony on House Bill 319
House State and Local Government Committee
Sharon Harvey, President and CEO, Cleveland Animal Protective League
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Chair Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of the House State & Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 319, which names the Shelter Pet as the Official Pet of Ohio.

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. Each year, we assist approximately 14,000 animals, with about half of those being admitted to our shelter for rehoming.

Shelter animals come to us through many different routes. They might be pets whose owners have surrendered them because they either cannot or do not want to keep them, stray animals, or animals that have been the victims of abuse or neglect. In most cases, these animals end up in shelters through no fault of their own. Whatever the reason, in some way, they have been failed by society – and we are there to help them.

In Cuyahoga County in 2016, approximately 12,600 animals were admitted to the three large shelters – the Cuyahoga County Animal Shelter, which handles stray and dangerous dogs in Cuyahoga County, Cleveland Animal Care & Control, which handles stray and dangerous dogs in the city of Cleveland, and the Cleveland Animal Protective League. Of those, 10,800 were adopted out, returned to owners, or transferred out to other organizations for adoption. Alone, the Cleveland APL's save rate for cats and dogs that came in for rehoming was 90%.

Due to the preventive programs we have implemented in our county, we are experiencing a steady decrease in shelter intake and an increase in live release rates. However, that is not the case across the entire state. And, even though our numbers are heading in the right direction, I believe that one animal that has to spend time in a shelter, no matter how nice or progressive the shelter, is one animal too many. Every companion animal should be wanted and living in a home as a member of the family.

Naming the Shelter Pet the Official Pet of Ohio will raise awareness about responsible pet guardianship, animals waiting in shelters for their second chance to be loved by a family, preventive programs like spay/neuter, and about animals that have been the victims of violence or neglect.

We live in an increasingly throw-away society, but pets that are living creatures should not be among the items we discard and forget. This legislation would send a strong message that the lives of these animals, who often have not experienced the best of humanity, matter and deserve acknowledgement.

I'd like to thank Representative Lanese for her work on this bill, and ask the committee to vote yes on the legislation. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this meaningful issue.