

HOUSE BILL 319 – PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF

Mary O'Connor-Shaver, Representative

Rescue Me Ohio (RMO)

October 11, 2017 – House State and Local Government Committee

Good morning Chair Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee.

My name is Mary O'Connor-Shaver and I am a Six Sigma Yellow Belt certified Project Coordinator for Fiserv (NASDAQ: FISV) with over a decade of experience in animal rescue and advocacy, three of which includes serving as the Board Secretary for Rescue Me Ohio ("RMO"). RMO is a 501(c)(3) education and advocacy nonprofit corporation with a focus on assisting shelters, humane societies and rescues throughout the entire state of Ohio.

Representing over 258,000 Facebook followers across the nation, RMO is a driving force behind increasing exposure for all of our Ohio county animal shelters, humane societies and approved rescues registered through the Ohio Department of Agriculture. We have assisted numerous county shelters with increasing their live release rates, increasing exposure and donations to fundraising drives and have assisted in cleaning and repairing a number of shelters in Ohio with our "Shelter Spruce Up" day program. RMO counts among its supporters: dog wardens, shelter staff, rescues, veterinarians, politicians, attorneys, judges, animal advocates and dog enthusiasts.

Given our organizations' dedication to supporting the county shelters, humane societies and approved rescues in the State of Ohio, I would like to begin my presentation by thanking Representative Laura Lanese and Legislative Aide Graham Lescallette for their leadership in sponsoring this important piece of legislation for Ohio voters and taxpayers.

As our national dialogue gets increasingly hostile, RMO believes it's important to find issues that we can all agree on. It's hard to imagine that anyone could disagree with taking care of cats and dogs.

Most of us regard companion pets as important members of our family. Unfortunately not all pets are cherished and loved. They are often abandoned, mistreated, neglected and ignored. And this is where many county-funded shelters come in and where we come full circle.

As we see an increase in opiate addiction, we see an increase in many societal problems, including the abandonment and neglect of companion pets. Many of these animals end up at the county-funded shelter.

As shelters witness an increase in intake, local governments see an increase in costs. *It is estimated that the annual cost to impound, house, euthanize and dispose of city and county-funded shelter animals across the country exceeds \$1 billion. (SOURCE: National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy—Shelter Statistics Survey)*

For RMO and their supporters, how we treat our companion pets is an indication of what kind of society we are. Designating the Shelter Pet as Ohio's State Pet is an important first step to ensuring that our companion pets get the care, compassion and loving homes that they so desperately need and rightfully deserve.

By honoring shelter pets, we wish to shine a critical spotlight on the shelter situation and to encourage everyone to consider adopting their pets from a county-funded shelter first. We want Ohioans to know what happens to a companion pet when they abandon it, erroneously thinking that the dog or cat doesn't know any better. We want Ohioans to never forget the trauma and tragedies that so many of these companion pets live through. And most importantly, we want our future generations to know that the dogs and cats living in county-funded shelters need a safe and loving home.

It is our hope this Committee will reflect on the opinions expressed by our group and supporters in today's testimony prior to recommending **Ohio House Bill 319** for review and passage by the Ohio House.

As the representative for Rescue Me Ohio, I greatly appreciate your time and consideration on this important piece of legislation for Ohioans, and I welcome any questions you may have.