

**Ohio House Economic Development, Commerce, and Labor
Committee**

HB 433, Veterinarians Continuing Ed for Neutering Services

Proponent Testimony by Grace Vitale

February 27, 2018

Dear Chair Young, Vice Chair Riedel, Ranking Minority Member Lepore-Hagan, and distinguished members of the House Economic Development, Commerce, and Labor Committee.

I am Grace Vitale, a Portage County resident. I am a real estate agent in the Greater Cleveland area, the founder and representative of National Animal Shelter Volunteers, a supporter and advocate for animal welfare every day, and I have been volunteering at the Cuyahoga County Animal Shelter in Valley View, Ohio, for 9 years.

Today I am here to speak about why I feel is important to pass HB 433 and how this bill will benefit the people of Ohio and those who work and volunteer diligently to care for animals in Ohio shelters. I will be talking about it mainly from an animal shelter volunteer's perspective.

Companion animals are an important part of our American culture and we love them like the family members that they are. However, it is no secret that the overpopulation of dogs and cats in every state in our country has become a big problem. My feeling is that the problem is more of a people problem than an animal problem.

I see HB 433 as a win-win-win for veterinarians, animals, and people who would spay or neuter, but may not have the means to be able to afford it. Some would say that if a person can't financially afford to provide spay or neuter for their animals they should not have them. My experience is different. I had an elderly client a couple years back. Her husband had died and she lived alone with two young cats who had been found as strays. She was on an extremely limited income and was also on lots of expensive medications for her heart. Neighbors

helped her with the cost of spaying her kitties. Those cats brought her emotional and mental comfort and were her constant companions. Her last years would have been extremely lonely without her companion kitties. She did pass away a few months ago, in her mid 80's, and the cats have been re-homed, a task made easier because they were already spayed.

From an animal shelter volunteer's perspective, I fully support this bill and I can speak for many other animal shelter volunteers on this point. Dogs and cats can have as many as 3 litters a year, and because many people do not spay or neuter their pets, we have shelters overflowing with animals who are either unwanted or end up in a shelter because their people do not have the ability or means to care for the animals produced.

One unaltered female and her puppies or kittens can produce between 20,000 and 67,000 animals in a 6 year time period, depending on which source you look at. About 50% of those animals end up in a shelter. The animals are not putting themselves there. They end up in shelters through no fault of their own. Irresponsible owners are 100% responsible for the problem. Compassionate shelter workers and volunteers work countless hours caring for these animals. They get to know them, walk them, clean up after them, soothe them, show them love, work hard at adoption events, spend hours and hours every week on social media sharing pictures of the dogs and cats in their care, and do whatever else they can to try to find loving forever homes for the poor unwanted souls in the shelters in which they work and volunteer. We pray hard and hold our breath for every animal in our care, hoping that they will be adopted. Yet, even with all the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional effort, thousands of loving, healthy, good natured, adoptable companion animals are killed in the shelters to make space for more loving, healthy, good natured, adoptable

companions animals, who may also be killed for nothing more than having irresponsible owners.

Ohio is no exception. We can do better. The best, most humane way to keep animals out of our shelters is to keep them from being born. Giving veterinarians a couple of credit hours toward their continuing education for community service is one small way to help with the animal overpopulation and the emotional toll it takes on the employees, volunteers, and the other interested people in the community who care about the shelter animals and put their hearts and souls into helping raise awareness about them.

Ohio can do better. I believe the people of Ohio are interested and informed when it comes to animal welfare. I believe Ohioans want more animal welfare, especially for companion animals. Anything that can be done to promote humane ways of reducing the companion animal overpopulation in our state would be welcomed by any Ohioan who loves animals, and there are a lot of us.

Thank you for considering my written testimony and for your attention to this important matter.