



Animal Welfare Institute

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TESTIMONY ON OHIO S.B. 167

Presented by Vicki Deisner, Animal Welfare Institute
Before the Ohio Senate Agricultural Committee
Wednesday, February 5, 2020

Chairman Hoagland, Vice-Chair Schaffer, Ranking Minority Member O'Brien, and distinguished members of the Senate Agricultural Committee, I am Vicki Deisner, Government Affairs representative for the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) in Ohio. and on behalf of AWI and our members and constituents in Ohio, we ask that your committee support S.B. 167.

AWI seeks to alleviate the suffering inflicted on animals by humans. To that goal, we ask that the Senate Agricultural Committee ban the use of the gas chamber in the state of Ohio in humane shelters, and require transition to euthanasia by injection (EBI), which is accepted by all national veterinary and humane organizations as the most humane method currently available for euthanasia. When performed properly by trained personnel, EBI is painless to the animal and takes effect within seconds. The use of other methods of causing death besides EBI, such as the gas chambers which can take over 45 minutes to kill an animal, is unacceptable in any setting where proper euthanasia drugs can be legally obtained.

Gas chambers are ineffective and inefficient. The gas chamber cannot be humanely used for the majority of shelter pets who require euthanasia. Old, sick and injured animals have circulatory problems that delay the effects of carbon monoxide, causing them to experience significant distress prior to losing consciousness. Likewise, young animals have physiological make-ups that render a humane death impossible. And when animals are pregnant, the mother typically dies well before the unborn puppies, causing them to suffocate to death. The 45 or more minutes it can take to end that animal's life is agonizing. The Association of Shelter Veterinarians has stated:

“An acceptable method of euthanasia must be quick and painless, and should not cause distress. Any gas that is inhaled must reach a certain concentration in the lungs before it can be effective (AVMA 2007). The high gas flow rates necessary to achieve the recommended concentrations of 6% can result in noise levels that frighten animals. Placing multiple animals in the chamber may frighten and distress the animals, and dilute the effective concentration of carbon monoxide that each animal receives, creating a haphazard euthanasia experience that can be prolonged, painful and ineffective.”

Gas chambers pose a danger to shelter staff. Carbon monoxide is a hazardous substance that is highly toxic with no odor, color or taste. It is one of the leading causes of accidental poisoning in the United States. Repeated exposure to carbon monoxide, even at low levels, can result in long-term effects including impaired memory, breathing difficulties, muscle weakness, heart irregularity, and brain damage. In addition, animals being put into a small, dark confining gas chamber may become fearful and react more adversely than animals who are gently restrained during EBI – thus increasing the danger for shelter staff. Shelter workers have been injured and

even killed by malfunctioning gas chambers – in 2000, a Tennessee shelter worker was killed due to carbon monoxide exposure while in the process of euthanizing an animal. The Association of Shelter Veterinarians has stated:

“Carbon monoxide is extremely hazardous to human health because it is toxic, odorless, and tasteless; it also has the potential to cause an explosion at high concentrations (AVMA 2007, NIOSH 2004). The death of at least one shelter worker using carbon monoxide has been documented (Rhoades 2002, Gilbert 2000, and NIOSH 2004). Chronic exposure to low levels of carbon monoxide can also cause serious human health problems.”

Gas chambers are more expensive. A 2009 study has proven that death by injection, including the costs of permitting and acquiring euthanasia drugs, actually costs less than using a gas chamber. According to the Association of Shelter Veterinarians:

“Use of carbon monoxide cannot be justified as a means to save money, take shortcuts, or distance staff emotionally and physically from the euthanasia process. Studies have shown that carbon monoxide is actually more expensive than euthanasia by injection (Fakkema 2009, Rhoades 2002). It takes longer than euthanasia by injection and has not been shown to provide emotional benefits for staff. Some staff have reported being distressed by hearing animals vocalizing, scratching and howling in the chamber and by having to repeat the process when animals survived the first procedure.”

Training for injection is readily available. Grants and training are readily available to help the few remaining humane shelters in Ohio transition to EBI. Grants are available from the Kenneth Scott Charitable Trust in Cleveland, Ohio, and the Ohio Animal Welfare Federation can assist in arranging training for shelter staff to transition to EBI.

In summary, AWI respectfully asks that the Senate Agricultural Committee pass S.B. 167 as amended to ban gas chambers in Ohio humane shelters. Thank you.