



Written Proponent Testimony on House Bill 67

Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Sharon Harvey, President and CEO, Cleveland Animal Protective League

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Chair Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member O'Brien, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 67, legislation to create the Veterinarian Student Debt Assistance Program. To qualify for the program, veterinarians must volunteer at least 12 hours of their service to a nonprofit organization, a humane society, a law enforcement agency or a state, local or federal government entity.

My name is Sharon Harvey, and I am 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. Each year, our organization assists more than 13,000 animals whose owners no longer want them or can't keep them, that belong to income-qualified owners who can't afford veterinary care but don't want to give up their pet, that are victims of animal abuse, neglect, or abandonment and come in through our humane investigations team, that we transfer in from other overcrowded, underserved shelters, or are otherwise homeless and need somewhere to go for care and a second chance at a better life. Our veterinary team provides basic to complex medical care to roughly 5,000 animals annually and performs more than 9,000 spay/neuter surgeries and 300 various other surgeries each year. As you can see, the need for veterinarians in animal shelters is great!

I see a number of benefits to this legislation. HB 67 would encourage veterinarians to provide community service in exchange for student loan reimbursement, which would strengthen partnerships with animal welfare organizations and animal care and control agencies. Services provided could improve community animal health for owners who cannot afford customary spay/neuter or other veterinary care fees, which would reduce animal suffering, homelessness, animal shelter overcrowding and, in some communities, euthanasia to relieve that overcrowding. Finally, the services could ease economic burden in municipalities whose shelters would benefit from free spay/neuter of adoptable animals or other targeted animal populations. As a matter of fact, I have shared HB 67 with animal welfare leaders across the country as a strong example of how partnerships between the animal welfare and veterinary community can be taken to a new level and better support the needs of animals and people in their communities and shelters.

I appreciate the amendment included to the bill that requires each recipient of assistance to submit information to the board detailing the charitable services completed by the veterinarian. I would suggest the language should be strengthened further to require that a certification process be established with the entity where the services were provided.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this meaningful legislation. I ask for your favorable consideration of this request and passage of this bill.