



# Animal Welfare Institute

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TESTIMONY ON OHIO S.B. 164

Presented by Vicki Deisner, Animal Welfare Institute

Before the Ohio House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Tuesday, November 29, 2022

Chairman Koehler, Vice-Chairman Creech, Ranking Minority Member Brent, and distinguished members of the House Agricultural and Conservation Committee, I am Vicki Deisner, the State Government Affairs Representative for Animal Welfare Institute (AWI). We thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of S.B. 164, a bill to update penalties for serious acts of cruelty towards companion animals and ban gas chambers in Ohio, and ask that the committee support S.B. 164 passage out of committee and through the House chamber.

AWI is grateful to the bill's sponsors for recognizing the need to provide meaningful penalties for egregious forms of cruelty. Animal cruelty in and of itself is a heinous act against some of the most vulnerable members of society. It is a crime everywhere, and it deserves more than a slap on the wrist. But it is a disservice to both animals and people to regard it as separate from other crimes. It is well known that animal abuse is linked to other crimes, including abuse of spouses and partners, children, and the elderly, as well as other forms of interpersonal violence, gang and drug offenses, and property crimes. In fact, in recognition of the seriousness of this crime and its relationship to other violence and criminal activity (please see attached journal article), in 2014 the FBI announced that it would begin collecting and reporting animal cruelty crimes as a separate offense under the agency's National Incident-based Reporting System (NIBRS), the prime source of information on crime in the United States. Animal cruelty crimes are classified as distinct Group A offenses, joining other major crimes such as arson, assault, and homicide, and require the reporting of both incidents and arrests. The reported crimes are categorized as simple/gross neglect; intentional abuse and torture; organized abuse; and animal sexual abuse.

Ohio is to be commended for recognizing that animal abuse and human violence go hand in hand. Four types of family violence — domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and animal cruelty— rarely occur in a vacuum. They often overlap, and the commission of one of these crimes often is a “red flag” that other forms have occurred or will be coming next. For various reasons, animal cruelty, abuse, and neglect are often the sentinel warning signs, and the first “link” in the chain of family violence.

A domestic violence case that occurred in Northwest Ohio clearly documents the need for seriously addressing animal abuse and enhancing the felony cruelty laws in Ohio so that entire families are protected. This case was brought to my attention by Officer Todd Curtis, former Detective Sergeant with the Perrysburg Township Police Department and currently Chief

Inspector with the Wood County Prosecutors office, during a meeting of the Wood County Domestic Violence Taskforce.

On August 16, 2020, Officer Curtis was involved in a case where a female was severely beaten and strangled by her husband, and hospitalized. In Officer Curtis' official statement, which is attached to this testimony, he states "In my 29 years of law enforcement, I have not investigated a strangulation case this severe where the victim has survived." This case started with an animal abuse situation in the home.

Earlier in 2020, the abuser in this case seized his daughter's dog, beat it and slit its throat in front of her, and then hung it by her favorite scarf from a tree in the yard for several days to teach his wife and daughter a lesson. The animal abuse was not addressed as a felony, the man was not jailed but was given an ankle monitor which he cut off. He was ordered to leave Lucas County and went to stay with his sister in Wood County.

He contacted his wife and stated he was going to commit suicide and she should come get his property on the porch. She went to her sister-in-law's house to stop him from committing suicide, but it turned out the threat was a ploy and he kidnapped her, beat, and strangled her for several days, almost killing her. Officer Curtis states in his testimony "I have worked cases where animals have been "objects of manipulation." I have worked cases where animals have been killed or disappeared in a way to deeply hurt and drive fear into a victim." Classifying the most egregious fifth-degree felony offenses of knowingly causing serious physical harm to a companion animal a violent offense parallels the federal NIBRS effort, as saving an animal life often saves human lives.

In addition, AWI strongly supports modernizing domestic animal euthanasia techniques by banning the antiquated use of gas chambers by animal shelters in Ohio. The use of gas chambers, which can take over 45 minutes to kill an animal, is unacceptable in any setting where modern euthanasia drugs can be legally obtained. The 45 or more minutes it can take to end that animal's life is agonizing.

AWI strongly requests that the House Agricultural and Conservation Committee support Ohio S.B. 164. A state that is safer for animals is a state that is safer for people too.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important piece of legislation.