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House Health Committee
Senate Bill 43-Sponsor Testimony
Tuesday, June 15, 2021

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 43.

Senate Bill 43 will bring awareness to a deadly and aggressive form of cancer, known as sarcoma. Sarcoma is a rare cancer of the connective tissue that can occur anywhere in the body in either the soft tissue or the bone (osteosarcoma). According to the American Cancer Society, about 13,460 new soft tissue sarcomas will be diagnosed in 2021 and approximately 5,350 people are expected to die of this cancer. This bill would enact Hank's law which would designate July as Sarcoma Awareness Month.

This legislation is very important to me because I lost my dog Hank to sarcoma. Hank came into my life on March 2, 2006. I never knew how much a dog could change your life. Hank was the first to teach me what unconditional love was. He taught me to stop and smell the roses. He showed me that if you have health and love you have everything. Even in the end Hank showed me how brave and strong someone can be for those they love.

Hank was diagnosed with an intrapelvic soft tissue sarcoma on February 1, 2013 after having problems going to the bathroom and not eating his treats. Hank fought his cancer for over 20 months. Hank went to Ohio State where he received radiation, chemo and surgery (the same treatments that people get). We even drove 20.5 hours to Colorado to the best surgeon in the United States. Even after all of this, Hank's cancer spread in November of 2014 and he passed of the disease.

After losing my Hank I decided that someone had to be the voice for dogs and people with sarcoma and I was going to be that person. I have traveled all over the world learning about canine cancer and sarcoma. I found out that dogs are 85% genetically like humans and by treating dogs with cancer, veterinarians gain important insights into improving treatments for humans as well. Also, clinical trials in dogs cost less money and give quicker results than those in humans. It is important to know about canine cancer because dogs and people share the same environment and cancer in dogs occurs naturally like in humans and is not induced like in mice.

Through research I have also learned that one in three dogs will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime and 50% will die of the disease. These statistics are comparable to humans with 1 in 3 women and 1 in 2 men being diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. I learned that some breeds of dogs are more prone to cancer than others and there are common signs to look for in canine cancer and sarcoma.

Dogs get sarcoma five times more than people and children are the second most common to be diagnosed with sarcoma. Both kids and dogs develop cancers with the presence of a functioning immune system. A dog's size provides a better model for evaluating the dosing and effects of new cancer medicines in pediatric patients. Dogs have a higher incidence of cancer than kids overall. For example, osteosarcoma strikes about 20,000 dogs in the U.S. each year, compared to 400-800 children. Childhood cancers are relatively rare and fundamentally different. As a result, childhood cancers are difficult to study and research is vastly under funded. Studying dogs can help doctors learn more about shared cancers for the benefit of childhood cancer patients.

When people hear of clinical trials in dogs they naturally assume that they are something harmful, but by doing clinical trials in dogs our dogs are given treatments to help give them a fighting chance against cancer as well. People also think scientists are giving dogs cancer but they get naturally occurring cancers just like humans and they are exposed to the same environmental conditions as humans are. By finding a cure for our companions it will lead to a cure for children and adults as well.

Hank's Law will provide awareness to those not familiar with canine cancer or sarcoma and will help educate them about how dogs and people get the same kinds of cancers. If this month can bring awareness to the signs to look for in canine cancer and sarcoma and an early diagnosis can be made, then all of our hard work and effort will pay off. Education is the key and knowledge is power.

Thank you once again, Chairman Huffman, and the members of the committee, for the opportunity to present this issue to you today. I will be pleased to answer any questions that the committee may have.