

Good morning Chairman Cirino, Vice Chairman Chavez, Ranking Member Senator Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee.

My name is Peggy Kaplan, and I serve as a Director of the Ohio Pet Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of the amendment to H.B. 96, SC0144, which mirrors the content and intent of H.B. 148.

This amendment would establish the Companion Animal Fund in the state treasury, allowing Ohio taxpayers to voluntarily donate a portion of their state income tax refunds to help reduce pet overpopulation. Currently, Ohio's tax return offers six donation options, one of which supports another 501(c)(3) nonprofit. The Companion Animal Fund would become the seventh option, focused on addressing a growing and costly issue in our communities.

Because these contributions are entirely voluntary, the amendment would not impact the state's General Revenue Fund. However, it would provide significant support to county animal shelters through enhanced funding for spay-neuter programs. These programs are vital for preventing unwanted litters, managing shelter capacity, and improving the welfare of animals and communities across the state.

The Fund would be administered by the Ohio Pet Fund, a nonprofit organization established in the Ohio Revised Code in 2004. For nearly two decades, we have distributed spay-neuter grant funds to county dog shelters and nonprofit rescue organizations across Ohio. Our current funding is generated through the sale of pet license plates. While this program has been successful and demonstrates strong public support, the need far exceeds what plate sales alone can provide.

Ohio is not alone in pursuing creative funding solutions to address pet overpopulation. Several other states combine both pet license plates and voluntary tax check-off donations to support this initiative. These models have proven to be effective, transparent, and well-received by taxpayers.

In Ohio, thousands of stray animals enter shelters each day—straining county budgets, shelter capacity, and staff. Animals running at large not only contribute to overpopulation but also pose risks to public safety, property, and municipal resources.

The Companion Animal Fund would expand the Ohio Pet Fund's ability to serve. Many smaller county shelters depend almost entirely on our grants to avoid returning unaltered pets to the community. Our all-volunteer board has also developed eligibility guidelines that include support for low-income pet owners, individuals with disabilities, and veterans with service-connected disabilities.

Adding this donation option is a simple, responsible, and compassionate way to give Ohio taxpayers the opportunity to support an issue they care about—at no cost to the state. It is a proactive step to take meaningful action to reduce shelter overcrowding.

I respectfully ask for your support of this amendment.

Letters of support from various county organizations are available:
<https://ohiohouse.gov/committees/agriculture/bills/hb148>

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on SC0144. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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