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### **Senate Judiciary Committee SB 64 Sponsor Testimony**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide Sponsor Testimony on Senate Bill 64.

Put simply, Senate Bill 64 aims to adequately punish those who harm companion animals, here in the State of Ohio. According to the Ohio Revised Code, a “Companion Animal” is defined as any animal that is kept inside a residential dwelling and any dog or cat regardless of where it is kept, including a pet store.

Companion animal abuse can take many different forms and may be caused by a wide array of contributing factors. Whether the abuse is knowingly, negligently or recklessly; the individuals perpetuating these crimes deserve to face heightened ramifications, in accordance with Ohio’s penal code. It is my strong belief, along with countless other Ohioans, that the act of committing violent, abusive crimes against companion animals should be subject to increased criminal punishments.

This bill has three main provisions: first; it increases the penalties for violating misdemeanor and felony companion animal cruelty offenses, secondly, it requires a court to impose the maximum prison term on misdemeanor and felony companion animal cruelty offenders, and lastly, it expands the prohibition that bans a felony animal abuse offender from owning certain animals under specified circumstances.

By making these crimes felonious, mandating jail time, and limiting the ability for companion animal ownership by offenders, the state's criminal code will work to properly reflect the heinous nature of these crimes.

Furthermore, research consistently highlights a troubling correlation between individuals who commit acts of animal cruelty and those who perpetrate violence against humans. Notably, in a landmark study conducted by the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) and Northeastern University, more than 25 years ago, it was concluded that people who abuse animals are five times more likely to commit violent crimes against humans. This statistical association underscores a critical warning sign for potential future violent behavior.

As an attorney, and fellow dog owner, it is difficult for me to objectively view the current criminal punishments, for these acts of animal cruelty, and be satisfied. Dogs, cats or any other pets for that matter, are the backbone and foundation of our families and the law should reflect that.

In closing, I believe that current law does not offer companion animals adequate protection, which is why I believe change is imminent. By enforcing the three main provisions forementioned, this legislation will ensure that animal cruelty, committed against companion animals, will be punishable to a greater, more appropriate degree.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 64. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.