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## Committees

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Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide Sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 185, which updates and clarifies sections of Ohio's Revised Code related to Dog Law and strengthens the authority of local dog wardens. I also want to recognize House Bill 247, sponsored by Representative Kevin Miller, which serves as companion and the vehicle legislation in the House.

While most dogs are beloved and loyal companions, there are rare but tragic instances where a dog seriously injures—or even kills—a person without provocation. In those cases, Ohio laws must be clear, consistent, and effective in protecting public safety, while ensuring that dog owners are held appropriately accountable.

Senate Bill 185 proposes several critical updates:

- **Modernizes and clarifies definitions** of *nuisance*, *dangerous*, and *vicious* dogs—terms that have not been substantively updated since 2013.
- **Establishes clear accountability** for dog owners who fail to properly confine or control dogs that pose a risk to others.
- **Empowers local dog wardens** with authority to seize a dog immediately after an attack and provides enforcement tools to uphold Ohio's Dog Law.

Under current Ohio law, dogs involved in incidents may be classified as Nuisance, Dangerous, or Vicious, depending on the severity and nature of the behavior. Senate Bill 185 improves this system by:

- Providing clearer definitions and legal guidance for courts and enforcement agencies.
- Creating graduated criminal penalties for owners who negligently allow their dog to engage in prohibited behavior.

The summary of the proposed penalties are:

### Nuisance Dog Act

- **First offense:** Minor misdemeanor

- **Subsequent offenses:** Fourth-degree misdemeanor

### **Dangerous Dog Act**

- **First offense:** Fourth-degree misdemeanor
- **Subsequent offenses:** Third-degree misdemeanor
- **If injury occurs and the dog was previously classified as dangerous or vicious:** Fifth-degree felony

### **Vicious Dog Act**

- **First offense:** Third-degree misdemeanor
- **Subsequent offenses:** Second-degree misdemeanor
- **If the act causes serious injury or death and the dog was previously classified:** Third-degree felony

Currently, Ohio law limits the authority of dog wardens to seize dangerous animals—even following a serious incident. Senate Bill 185 fixes this gap by:

- Authorizing wardens to immediately seize a dog involved in a violent, unprovoked attack.
- Clarifying that dog wardens have full authority to enforce Ohio's Dog Law, including the power to make arrests when necessary.

It's important to note that Senate Bill 185 applies only to unprovoked attacks. Dogs that act in defense of themselves, their owners, or their property are explicitly protected under this bill. The intent is not to punish responsible owners or protective dogs—but to address cases of negligence where public safety is at risk.

Dog ownership is a privilege that comes with real responsibility. While most owners take this seriously, the law must provide a strong framework for when that responsibility is neglected. Senate Bill 185 ensures public safety, strengthens local enforcement, and brings needed clarity to outdated sections of law—all while respecting the rights of responsible dog owners.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of Senate Bill 185. I would be glad to answer any questions from the committee.