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Good morning, Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member DeMora and members of the Senate Ways and Means committee. Thank you for the opportunity to give sponsor testimony on House Bill 148 and to encourage your support for this legislation

House Bill 148 establishes the Companion Animal Fund in the state treasury to allow Ohio taxpayers the option to donate a portion, or all, of their state tax refunds to help prevent pet overpopulation. There are currently six options on the Ohio income tax form for refund donation; the Companion Animal Fund would become the seventh option.

The Fund would be administered by the Ohio Pet Fund, a not-for-profit organization established in the Ohio Revised Code in 2004, with approximately 20 years of experience in distributing spay and neuter funds to organizations in our counties. The Ohio Pet Fund distributes grants from the sale of pet license plates to Ohio county dog shelters and non-profit organizations that assist in rehoming dogs and cats. Spaying and neutering the pets prior to adoption helps to prevent unwanted litters and curbs overpopulation. While the pet friendly spay-neuter license plates have been successful, proving the public's interest in the overpopulation problem, there are just not enough funds to meet the demand.

The Companion Animal Fund would increase the funding the Ohio Pet Fund distributes, which would help address the population of stray dogs and cats. The cat population, in particular, has exponential growth. One unaltered stray cat, with about three litters a year, could be responsible for thousands of kittens in ten years' time. Stray dogs can have two litters per year. We can't adopt our way out of this situation. The problem needs to be addressed by prevention.

Here is a picture of my rescue cat Hemi. Hemi is approximately 5 years old and was rescued in 2023 from an animal hoarding situation. The rescue organization had him vetted and neutered- you can tell by the clipped ear- then placed him up for adoption and he came to live with me where he rules the house with an iron paw.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for HB 148. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.