Thank you and good morning Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member DeMora and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide Proponent Testimony today on House Bill 148.

My name is Mirna Bowman. I am the Executive Director of the Columbus Dog Connection. We are a small not for profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of dogs and cats in need with a focus on stray animals. Whether people are looking to adopt or need affordable veterinary services, we're here to help. We rely 100 % on monetary and in-kind donations and receive no state or federal funding.

I am offering support for House Bill 148 which establishes the Companion Animal Fund in the state treasury to allow Ohio taxpayers to donate a portion of their tax refunds for spay and neuter surgeries.

As a recipient of funds generated from the Pet Friendly license plate, the Ohio Pet Fund has awarded grants to us over the years to subsidize surgeries for animal shelters, rescue groups and the low-income community. However, our costs far exceed the ability to help us with spay and neuter expenses. For this reason we support House Bill 148 which could bring in needed additional funding from the state voluntary tax check off for the Companion Animal Fund to be administered by the Ohio Pet Fund.

Last year our veterinarians performed 982 spays and neuters of dogs and cats across Ohio with our mobile spay and neuter vehicle. We assist Ohio pet adoption groups and organizations that help people of low-income with their pets. With the passage of HB 148 we may be able to double that amount.

2024 was a very difficult year for us. In March we removed 28 animals from a trailer park hoarding situation with dogs and cats in deplorable conditions.

In April two women showed up at our door asking for help. If we didn't take the kittens they had, they were going to dump them in a nearby park. Turns out they had been dumping kittens for 2 years in various places across Columbus. The 19 kittens they had in their home were given to us and put in our volunteer foster program. The stories are endless and the need for additional funding for spay and neuter surgeries is great.

To make matters even more difficult, our local Humane Society is no longer taking in stray cats and their kittens and our dog shelter has closed off dog intakes multiple times, which has led to an increase in strays throughout our county. We are getting inundated with calls from desperate people. Our best way to help is by offering spays and neuters at low cost to prevent unwanted litters.

For these reasons I am offering support and encouragement for passage to this committee of House Bill 148.

Thank you again Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner and Ranking Member DeMora and members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide Proponent testimony today for House Bill 148.

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