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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE OHIO SENATE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE ON H.B. 148 24 MARCH 2026 BY JIM TRAKAS, LEGISLATIVE AGENT, OHIO PET FUND

Mr. Chairman Blessing, Madame Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member DeMora esteemed Members of the Committee. My name is Jim Trakas, and I represent the Ohio Pet Fund, an Ohio not for profit corporation before the General Assembly and am offering proponent testimony on Rep. Sharon Ray's H.B. 148 before the Committee today.

The reason behind the legislation is straightforward. Ohio's dog and cat population has been growing and exceeding the amount of public dollars available to deal with care of pets who don't have homes. The Ohio Pet Fund helps to place pets in homes by working with local not for profit pet charities as well as local and county animal shelters and animal control officers. The Pet Fund has a remarkable record of success in spaying and neutering animals to cut down on the population that is on the streets or in shelters and has an extensive network of government and not for profit entities that it works with who place dogs and cats in loving homes and spay & them, striving to relieve the burden on public animal shelters.

For 20 years, The Ohio Pet Fund operates the second most popular specialty license plate program, dedicating hundreds of thousands of dollars to local shelters & not for profits in every county in Ohio annually. But the need for spay, neutering, and adoptions are even greater than the sale of license plates can provide revenue for. That is where H.B. 148 comes in. The bill allows for Ohioans to dedicate a portion of their annual tax refund through a voluntary tax donation to this charity, similarly to the Breast & Cervical Cancer Project or the Military Relief Fund or other worthy priorities under Ohio law. H.B. 148 would allow for the first pet charity to be an option for this practice.

H.B. 148 creates this voluntary tax refund donation, which has no impact to the State Treasury, is not a tax exemption, but joins other worthy charities that Ohioans can contribute to if they choose.

We know that H.B. 148 isn't the most important bill you have before you, but it is important to the pet shelters and charities that are overwhelmed with stray dogs and cats. There is a timing issue that I would like to call to your attention. If this simple bill can be passed here in the Spring and signed into law by Governor DeWine before Summer, then the Ohio Department of Taxation will be able to include this voluntary tax donation on 2026 tax forms, so voluntary donations could start flowing in 2027. If the bill waits until later this year, it will take a year and one half to implement, so I hope that this detail can help prevail upon you if you support the legislation, to please support it soon so that there is not an overly long wait for this policy to be implemented.

With the need to reduce the stray animal population increasing, the Ohio Pet Fund believes that H.B. 148 can help them to provide more voluntary, non-tax dollar resources to place even more pets and help shelters, particularly in our urban areas and small towns or counties, that can get overwhelmed by strays.

The Ohio Pet Fund is a transparent 501 C3 Organization, has publicly available open books and will continue to file regular reports with the Ohio Attorney General. HB 148 also provides for the Ohio Pet Fund to report on alternate years to the Ohio General Assembly, increasing transparency. The group's 990 tax return is available at multiple websites online. The Pet Fund has a 6 person board of individuals are open, transparent, highly passionate and competent and would continue to be excellent stewards of donated funds to help foster animal adoptions to make Ohioans happy, spay & neuter pets, and enjoys an impeccable reputation as a superb not for profit organization.

H.B. 148 is good public policy, helps alleviate the cost of local and county government, allows for a well-established, respected, and highly competent charity to work with local pet shelters, animal control officers, and pet charities to provide critical mass to this issue. I ask the Committee to favorably consider H.B. 148 and thank the Chairman for scheduling this hearing. I am happy to answer any questions at this time and appreciate very much all that you do to benefit the people of Ohio, and in this case, the dogs and cats in Ohio who love their homes. Oh, and my little cat family consisting of Sir Winston, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Penelope, and the newly adopted Monty, thank you as well. Yes, after 8 years in the Ohio House, I have turned into a crazy cat daddy.