



Proponent testimony – H.B. 60

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Chairman Hill and honorable members of the House Agriculture & Rural Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of H.B. 60 on behalf of our Board of Directors.

I serve as the President & CEO of the Cleveland Animal Protective League, the humane society for Cuyahoga County since 1913. We are a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) that organized under ORC 1717, and as such, we have the authority to appoint humane agents who, once they successfully complete state-mandated training and have their appointment approved by our probate court, are authorized to enforce Ohio's animal protection laws, specifically ORC 959. They work with our special prosecutor to bring justice for animals that have been helpless victims of violent or negligent acts. Last year we received more than 3,300 reports of suspected animal abuse and opened nearly 1,400 new investigations resulting in the confiscation or voluntary surrender of nearly 550 animals. Of the cases opened, 22 went on to have misdemeanor charges filed against the offenders.

Currently in Ohio, regardless of the severity of the act, unless an act of cruelty is knowingly committed by the owner, manager or employee of a dog kennel, animal abusers can only be charged with a first or second degree misdemeanor for a first act of cruelty. I can assure you that existing penalties for crimes against animals that are violent and disturbing in nature and/or that cause serious physical harm to companion animals are soft, outmoded, and ineffectual. Considering the very strong link between animal cruelty and violent acts against people, these weak penalties aren't just negatively impacting animals, but also people.

Ohioans have been outraged by stories of seriously neglectful, malicious, intentionally violent, abusive acts against companion animals. Just looking at the past three years, Ohio animals in urban, suburban, and rural areas alike have been stabbed, beaten with hammers, set on fire, knowingly starved, thrown against walls, shot with bullets or arrows, or otherwise tortured and left to suffer – and they have been charged with misdemeanors. While a misdemeanor level penalty will suffice in many cases, it's far from adequate in the more egregious cases.

We ask you to hear the public demand for Ohio to strengthen its companion animal protection laws and allow prosecutors to charge first-time offenders with a felony of the fifth degree for egregious acts of cruelty that result in serious physical harm to a companion animals. As a compassionate society, we need to set a higher legal and moral standard for how we hold one another accountable for such blatant cruelty against living creatures.

Passing HB 60 will provide our humane law enforcement teams with the tools they need right now to make Ohio a safer place for companion animals and people.

Thank you for your time and attention in considering our testimony on H.B. 60. We implore you to pass this bill.

Respectfully,

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