

## HOUSE BILL 60 – PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF

Mike Smeck, Representative

Animal Cruelty Task Force of Ohio, Joseph's Legacy, Justice for Herbie, Ohio Coalition of Dog Advocates, Nitro Foundation/Nitro's Ohio Army, Ohio Voters for Companion Animals, Inc., Paws and the Law, Matt Ditchey, Esq. (Angels for Animals)  
May 26, 2015 – House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee

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Good morning Chairman Hill and Members of the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee.

My name is Mike Smeck and I currently reside with my family in Amherst, Ohio (Lorain county). I am here today speaking on behalf of the following seven grassroots animal welfare organizations: Animal Cruelty Task Force of Ohio, Joseph's Legacy, Justice for Herbie, Nitro Foundation/Nitro's Ohio Army, Ohio Coalition of Dog Advocates, Ohio Voters for Companion Animals, Inc., Paws and the Law and Matt Ditchey, Esq. (Angels for Animals) as a proponent for Ohio House Bill 60 as introduced in the 131<sup>st</sup> Ohio General Assembly.

Representing over 67,000 constituents across 72 Ohio counties, our seven Ohio-citizen driven, community based organizations are the driving force behind legislative efforts to address issues impacting the health and safety of companion animals as defined under Ohio Revised Code 959. Our supporters include a diverse section of voters and taxpayers from across the state, including but not limited to, a broad range of dog enthusiasts, veterinarians, breeders, animal care and welfare organizations, animal control representatives, appointed humane agents, judges, attorneys, and government employees who understand state and federal governance.

Given our coalition's dedication to educate and support the law enforcement and judicial communities in the enforcement and administration of Ohio's animal welfare laws, I want to begin my testimony by thanking Representatives Patmon and Hall for their leadership in sponsoring this important piece of legislation for Ohioans.

Companion animal cruelty is viewed as a serious issue by law enforcement and mental health professionals, who recognize the strong link between companion animal abuse and human violence. While Ohio's humane ranking has improved over the past four years with the passage of House Bill 14 in the 129<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly and Nitro's Law as an amendment to House Bill 59 in the 130<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly, when we look closely at our cruelty statute it remains rather weak in comparison to other states across the country.

We also feel strongly that as we continue to make headway on the opiate issue, we will see new trends — and conversation is suggesting this is already happening — of people who harm companion animals in order to obtain a prescription for an opiate with no intent to provide that level of care to the companion animal, but instead use the narcotic personally or sell it for profit.

Given these concerns, our coalition firmly believes the passage of HB 60 as introduced would represent the emergence of a statewide consensus that egregious abuse against a companion animal should be treated as a serious crime. Although there is much more work left to be done, to enact a felony provision for companion animal cruelty beyond Nitro's Law would mark a significant milestone in an undeniable trend favoring increased penalties for those who commit profound, intentional acts of serious physical injury against all companion animals, to include dogs regardless of where they may be kept.

It is our hope this Committee will reflect on the opinions expressed by our seven groups and their supporters in today's testimony prior to recommending Ohio House Bill 60 as introduced for review and passage by the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee.

As the representative for Animal Cruelty Task Force of Ohio, Joseph's Legacy, Justice for Herbie, Nitro Foundation/Nitro's Ohio Army, Ohio Coalition of Dog Advocates, Ohio Voters for Companion Animals, Inc., Paws and the Law and Matt Ditchey, Esq. (Angels for Animals), I greatly appreciate your time and consideration on this important piece of legislation for Ohioans, and I welcome any questions you may have.