

## HB 60 Proponent Testimony

Good morning Chairman Hill, Vice Chairman Burkley, Ranking Member Patterson and fellow members of the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on House Bill 60 as introduced.

My name is Jason Cooke and I currently reside in Mahoning County. Having served for the past five years as a volunteer, board member, and former president of Animal Charity Humane Society, I have great interest in all legislation that affects the wellness of our animals, and in particular, the legislation I am here to give testimony on today: House Bill 60.

House Bill 60, or Goddard's Law, as it is commonly referred to, is a very important bill that has garnered enormous support within the animal welfare community for reasons that are obvious, and one that is perhaps not as apparent or been brought to this Committee's attention . I stand here today before you to elaborate on both.

As I mentioned, I was with our local humane society for five years, during which time I witnessed acts so heinous and cruel, that I will spare the Committee members from going into any detail during my testimony, but will gladly address the issue should any Members have questions upon the completion of my testimony . With each act of depravity, I took it upon myself to ensure the victims of these acts received justice by going to rallies on court dates, speaking regularly with our local media, and utilizing social media to make sure their story was told. I quickly realized however, that the laws regarding animal abuse and their associated penalties are a "one size fits all"; by that I mean that the ORC treats all cases of animal cruelty as just that, a case of animal cruelty. Regardless if the animal lives or dies, is permanently maimed or scarred, or is left chained to a dog house to starve to death, it is a misdemeanor. The law, as it stands now, does not take into account the severity of the act of animal cruelty or the malice used to perform said act. If a defendant is convicted of animal cruelty or neglect, then of course the judge can, and often does, take into account the totality of the crime and hands down a punishment accordingly. Unfortunately, the judge cannot go out of the scope of the ORC which pertains to the given offense, and is forced to work within the guidelines of the degree of misdemeanor in which the defendant is guilty of.

House Bill 60 is meant to take the most heinous and egregious acts of animal cruelty to the next level by introducing language that states "Whoever violates division (C) of section 959.131 of the Revised Code is guilty of a felony of the fifth degree". In addition, it also introduces language that states "Whoever violates division (E) of section 959.131 of the Revised Code is guilty of a felony of the fifth degree". I believe each of the members of this committee has a copy of the bill, and therefore, I will refrain from expanding any further on divisions (C) and (E).

I would like to end this portion of my testimony by reiterating that this bill is focused on, well, the worst of the worse. It is aimed at members of our society that exhibit no empathy for their crimes against animals, and as studies have shown, most likely carry out abusive acts on their spouses, children, and others in our society; in part due to their nature but also due in part to the lacking of any severe consequences for their actions. This leads into the final portion of my testimony, one that focuses on perhaps the not so obvious reason that House Bill 60 should become a law as it is written, namely it serving also as a deterrent , as most of our great laws do.

I believe that Liz Raab and Tom Siesto, the owners of their loving dog Nitro, said it best before Committee about the importance of a deterrent with the following:

“...The lawmakers of our great land and country are entrusted by the taxpayers to set the tone of intolerance on violent crime. Crimes against defenseless animals are the same types crimes done to defenseless children and other fellow humans and are all one in the same; they are all victims, Please do not misunderstand or think that we are naïve in thinking the solution is putting these criminals behind bars and the problem is solved. What we do understand is the fact that laws, punishments, and consequences can and do serve as deterrents in setting the tone of intolerance for crimes and for those that commit them. It is our duty as fellow human beings to protect those that cannot protect themselves...”.

In closing, I would just like to say that Ohio continues to rank very low in terms of animal legislation by several major organizations. Nonetheless, the Members of this Committee in which I stand before today can help change that by supporting House Bill 60 as introduced.

I appreciate Chairman Hill, Vice Chairman Burkley, Ranking Member Patterson and fellow members of the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee for listening to my proponent testimony for House Bill 60 as introduced and I will gladly take any questions the Members of the Committee may have.