

My name is Luke Westerman. I'm a long-time Wall Street investor turned Venture Capitalist. I'm also the Founder and CEO of Solomon Global Holdings, a venture capital firm with an international portfolio but with a strong focus on investing in Ohio businesses.

I'm not originally from Central Ohio, but my family and I have chosen to relocate here over any other city in the world and over any other state in the country. We made this very intentional decision because we appreciate the values, beliefs and convictions that the folks in Ohio proudly personify.

Values like moral decency, duty, justice, responsibility and an ethical code that I feel is a cut above what you find elsewhere.

My wife and I do not have children. However, we do have two dogs who have very much become *our children*.

Over the past several years we have become more and more aware of the particular laws here in our state with respect to animal welfare – the laws that protect “our children”.

The more we became aware of the laws, the more we realized there was drastic room for improvement. And subsequently, the more active we have become in working to improve said laws.

Our private family foundation supports various groups who lobby in favor of these laws. We also support dozens of non-profits (locally and nationally) who work to improve the lives of both people AND animals.

Also, my wife and I, along with our friend and colleague, Steffen Baldwin, created (what Huffington Post called), “the country’s first Political Action Committee for discriminated against dogs” (Ohioans Against Breed Discrimination), where we are working to introduce legislation making it illegal to discriminate against any breed of dog simply because of how they look and the breed of dog they are.

We believe that discrimination is NEVER a good policy and is a very slippery slope.

So... as the law is currently written here in Ohio, someone could abuse and even viciously murder a defenseless dog or cat - with only very minor consequences. Someone could even abuse and harm my dogs (i.e. my children) with only minor consequences.

This is a very disconcerting reality that desperately needs remedied.

Studies show that losing a pet can be as traumatic as losing a human family member – especially for folks like my wife and me (whose pets are our children).

It's critically important to understand that lax laws with respect to animal cruelty (and even murder) create human victims as well – not just animal. My wife and I would never fully recover from something like that happening to our boys. And to think that the perpetrator of such a heinous act could walk away relatively un-consequenced is unacceptable and entirely unjust.

As you know, people don't just wake up one morning and decide on a whim to commit a heinous act of violence towards an animal or a child. And it's usually not an isolated incident.

These acts are systemic and almost always repeat themselves cyclically - unless the law intervenes and stops them, that is.

Again, it's important to recognize that we're not talking about a scenario of animals versus people here. Far from it. Animal cruelty most certainly (and quite dramatically) harms people as well – your voting, tax-paying constituents I might add.

Studies show that those who abuse or torture innocent and defenseless animals would almost certainly receive a clinical diagnosis as “psychopathic”.

Because our laws against these disgusting, sick acts are currently so weak, most go unpunished - meaning the perpetrators are allowed to indulge their psychopathic inclinations without consequence.

Studies show that this unpunished indulgence emboldens the perpetrator and usually leads to an addiction to abusive and cruel behavior - which almost always escalates.

And the data proves that most of these offenders then go onto hurt children (also innocent and defenseless beings) and then move onto their peers - usually women or the elderly... And so on and so on and so on...

The correlation is undeniable. And animal abuse is usually where it begins.

And until we legislate better laws that nip this sort of psychopathic behavior in the bud when first exhibited, we will remain complacent in the cycle and escalation of violence in our state.

We **MUST** pass this bill and others like it.

If not for the innocent animals (which should be more than enough reason), then for the abuser's future victims (i.e. your children and grandchildren).

We need to teach future generations to value and respect life - children, adults, the elderly **AND** animals. Better laws help to do that.

The bottom line (as I see it) - If we care about people we must care about animals.

Let me leave you with a profound quote from Gandhi which says, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way it treats its animals".