

HB 60 Interested Party Testimony

Dear Chairman Hite and Honorable Members of the Senate Agricultural Committee:

Purpose

My name is Jason Dean Cooke and I stand before you today to present interested party testimony on HB 60. In June of last year, I gave proponent testimony on HB 60 in front of the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. At the time, I felt HB 60 was a workable bill but had reservations about its then current form compared to when it was first introduced. In all honesty, my testimony should have been interested party and not proponent. With the amendment prohibiting humane societies from appointing a special prosecutor to handle crimes that fall under HB 60, my reservations have now become concerns. I will now begin my interested party testimony on HB 60.

Background

For six years now, I have worked in animal rescue, animal education, and animal advocacy. I am the former president of the humane society serving Mahoning County and currently serve on the Board of Directors for a local rescue in Austintown, Ohio. I am also a member of multiple grassroots organizations that strive to change animal laws in Ohio with regard to cruelty, neglect, tethering, and discrimination. I have witnessed firsthand such heinous acts perpetrated on our animals, that to this very day, those disturbing images have yet to leave my mind.

Repeal of a Humane Societies Ability To Appoint a Special Prosecutor

As a member of many organizations, I have held and attended countless rallies outside of courthouses in which a defendant is charged with an act of animal cruelty; not just to let people know that this behavior is entirely unacceptable, but also to keep the public's eyes focused on the case. Far too many times, I have watched as defendants are not properly charged, bond for care is not requested, cases dragging on in excess of a year, and findings of guilt resulting in punishments woefully inadequate. Not once however, have I witnessed any of the aforementioned events take place when these cases are handled by a special prosecutor being appointed by the county humane society. The reason is not that local prosecutors are incompetent or unable to prosecute these cases; it comes down to knowing the law with regard to animal cruelty and neglect and applying it on a regular basis. Animal law can be incredibly complex, and with new case law being established every day, this further adds to its complexity. A special prosecutor is much more apt to handle these cases in my opinion, and can give these cases the much needed expertise, attention, and priority they deserve. Prohibiting a humane society from appointing a special prosecutor to handle felony cases of animal cruelty is a mistake. As with local prosecutors, county prosecutors simply do not have the experience to handle these types of cases. It is not due to incompetence or lack of caring, but more so a lack of repetition. I respectfully request that the added amendment be removed from HB 60, and the bill be returned to the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee for further review.

Conclusion

I wish to thank Chairman Hite and Honorable Members of the Senate Agricultural Committee for affording myself the opportunity to give interested party testimony on HB 60, and will gladly answer to the best of my ability any questions the members of the committee may have.

Thank you,
Jason Dean Cooke
Animal Advocate
State Of Ohio