

SENATE BILL 271 – PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF

Mary O'Connor-Shaver, Representative

Angels for Animals, Joseph's Legacy, Justice for Herbie, Ohio Coalition of Dog Advocates, Nitro Foundation/Nitro's Ohio Army and Ohio Voters for Companion Animals, Inc. - OVCA

November 30, 2016 – Senate Agriculture Committee

Good afternoon Chairman Hite and Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee.

My name is Mary O'Connor-Shaver and I currently reside with my family in Lewis Center, Ohio (Delaware county). I am submitting written testimony on behalf of the following six grassroots animal welfare organizations - Angels for Animals, Joseph's Legacy, Justice for Herbie, Nitro Foundation/Nitro's Ohio Army, Ohio Coalition of Dog Advocates and Ohio Voters for Companion Animals, Inc. - OVCA - as a proponent for Ohio Senate Bill 271.

Representing over 87,000 constituents across 88 Ohio counties, our six 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 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 Senator Lou Gentile for his leadership in sponsoring this important piece of legislation for Ohioans.

As sentient creatures who undergo extensive training to perform many critical functions to protect our communities, these K9 officers, due to their strength, agility, courage and other amazing capabilities, can be utilized to assist law enforcement in various tasks which includes but is not limited to searching for and the apprehension of potentially violent criminals, locating missing persons and children, tracking suspects from crime scenes, locating evidence and performing searches for hiding persons.

Many who work with K9 officers in a variety of capacities understand that it is a tragic oversight that these selfless and loyal soldiers, officers, rescuers and partners are often overlooked by the communities they serve as well as the agencies and organizations that employ them. No human counterpart goes home with their partner, becomes part of the family or is expected to give up their life for their partner, but K9 officers do this daily, often without any more recognition than any other fixed asset.

The bond between these remarkable K9 officers and their partners is very strong and lasts for a lifetime. Each of them has a keen respect for, and appreciation of, each other and together they form a team, both of whom have a specific role that must be accomplished.

When police officers retire from service in Ohio, it sometimes means saying goodbye to their closest colleagues — their K9 partners. Officers and their dogs spend every day together, risking their lives to protect our communities. They should be given the option to spend retirement together, but unfortunately state law is standing in the way.

We firmly believe Ohio Senate Bill 271 seeks to strike a balance between the best interest of the K9 officer and protecting taxpayers' dollars by giving local government the authority to decide. Most importantly, we believe the proposed legislation gives one more option to local governments and to the police officer to keep the bond between K9 and partner whole if they decide that is the best outcome.

It is our hope this Committee will reflect on the opinions expressed by our six groups and their supporters in today's testimony prior to recommending Ohio Senate Bill 271 for review and passage by the Ohio Senate.

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