



Animal Welfare Institute

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TESTIMONY ON OHIO S.B. 164

Presented by Vicki Deisner, Animal Welfare Institute

Before the Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

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Chairman Schaffer, Vice-Chairman Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee, I am Vicki Deisner, the Government Affairs Representative for Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) in Ohio. We thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in support of S.B. 164, a bill to increase penalties for serious acts of cruelty towards companion animals.

AWI is grateful to the bill's sponsors and cosponsors for recognizing the need to provide enhanced penalties for egregious forms of cruelty. Animal cruelty in and of itself is a heinous act against some of the most vulnerable members of society. It is a crime everywhere, and it deserves more than a slap on the wrist. But it is a disservice to both animals and people to regard it as separate from other crimes. It is well known that animal abuse is linked to other crimes, including abuse of spouses and partners, children, and the elderly, as well as other forms of interpersonal violence, gang and drug offenses, and property crimes. In fact, in recognition of the seriousness of this crime and its relationship to other violence and criminal activity (please see attached journal article), in 2014 the FBI announced that it would begin collecting and reporting animal cruelty crimes as a separate offense under the agency's National Incident-based Reporting System (NIBRS), the prime source of information on crime in the United States. Animal cruelty crimes will be classified as distinct Group A offenses, joining other major crimes such as arson, assault, and homicide, and will require the reporting of both incidents and arrests. The reported crimes will be categorized as simple/gross neglect; intentional abuse and torture; organized abuse; and animal sexual abuse. Collecting of those data has begun.

Ohio is to be commended for recognizing that the treatment of animal cruelty needs to be strengthened, and then moving to make those improvements by considering this bill. Animal abuse and human violence go hand in hand. Four types of family violence — domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and animal cruelty— rarely occur in a vacuum. They often overlap, and the commission of one of these crimes often is a “red flag” that other forms have occurred or will be coming next. For various reasons, animal cruelty, abuse, and neglect are often the sentinel warning signs, and the first “link” in the chain of family violence.

Last summer there was a domestic violence case in Northwest Ohio that clearly documents the need for seriously addressing animal abuse and enhancing the felony cruelty laws in Ohio so that entire families are protected. This case was brought to my attention by Officer Todd

Curtis, Detective Sergeant with the Perrysburg Township Police Department, during a meeting of the Wood County Domestic Violence Taskforce.

On August 16, 2020, Officer Curtis was involved in a case where a female was severely beaten and strangled by her husband, and hospitalized. In Officer Curtis' official statement, which is attached to this testimony, he states "In my 29 years of law enforcement, I have not investigated a strangulation case this severe where the victim has survived." This case started with an animal abuse situation in the home.

Earlier in 2020, the abuser in this case seized his daughter's dog, slit its throat in front of her, slit its abdomen and pulled out the entrails on to the daughter's bedroom carpet, and then hung it by her favorite scarf from a tree in the yard for several days to teach her a lesson. The animal abuse was not addressed as a felony and the man was not jailed. He was ordered to leave Lucas County and went to stay with his sister in Wood County.

He contacted his wife and stated he was going to commit suicide and she should come get his property on the porch. She went to her sister-in-law's house to stop him from committing suicide, but it turned out the threat was a ploy and he kidnapped her, beat and strangled her, and almost killed her.

AWI strongly requests that the Senate Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee supports Ohio S.B. 164, in light of the link between animal and human violence, and also amends Goddard's Law so that both county and special prosecutors can pursue felony charges against animal offenders. A state that is safer for animals is a state that is safer for people too.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important piece of legislation.