



Written Proponent Testimony on House Bill 350
House Criminal Justice Committee
February 24, 2020

Chairman Lang, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written proponent testimony on House Bill 350, legislation to reenact current law provisions regarding animal fighting and bestiality, which were overturned in eight counties when the Ohio Sixth Appellate District Court found SB 331, which passed during the 131st General Assembly, in violation of the single subject rule. This bill is needed to reenact these laws in those eight counties and ensure that uniform enforcement and justice is applied across the state.

The Ohio Animal Welfare Federation, formerly the Ohio Federated Humane Societies, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that exists to prevent cruelty to animals by coordinating and enhancing the activities of private, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) animal welfare organizations incorporated in Ohio and county, municipal, and local animal agencies; share information with lawmakers and policymakers about the humane treatment of animals and their value to humans; provide training, resources and information on humane principles that will enhance the welfare of animals in the State of Ohio; and encourage cooperative, supportive, and collaborative relationships among humane societies, animal control facilities, and other animal welfare organizations.

Under ORC 1717, our member humane societies are empowered to appoint humane agents who enforce Ohio's animal protection laws (ORC 959). This authority includes investigating acts of animal cruelty that may include suspected cockfighting, a violent and inhumane blood sport, and the depraved act of having sexual contact with an animals, also known as bestiality. As a result of the Sixth District Court ruling, bestiality is no longer a crime and involvement in activities that support cockfighting, including allowing children to be present, is no longer a felony in eight counties in Ohio.

Language was also included in Senate Bill 331 that removed the requirement that humane agents live in the county where they are employed. Because of the legal challenge to SB 331, there now is inconsistent application of this provision, as well. I ask for your support of an amendment to reenact current law in these eight counties and make the law allowing humane agents to live outside of the county of their employment uniform across the state.

The Board of Trustees of the OAWF is grateful to the bill sponsors for recognizing the need to ensure that the laws passed regarding animal fighting, bestiality, and humane agent residency under Senate Bill 331 are applied consistently across the state. We urge the committee to support House Bill 350 and the requested amendment.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our testimony and this important issue.

Lori Carlson, President, OAWF
Executive Director, Licking County Humane Society
Licking County

Hope Brustein, Vice President, OAWF
Executive Director, Rescue Village
Geauga County

Lee Nesler, Secretary/Treasurer, OAWF
Executive Director, Lake Humane Society
Lake County

Sharon Harvey, Board Member, OAWF
President & CEO, Cleveland Animal Protective League
Cuyahoga County

Rachel Finney, Board Member, OAWF
CEO, Columbus Humane Society
Franklin County

Brian Weltge, Board Member, OAWF
President & CEO, Humane Society of Greater Dayton
Montgomery County

Cheryl Rakich, Board Member, OAWF
Executive Director, Almost Home Dog Rescue of Ohio
Franklin County

Todd McCullough, Board Member, OAWF
Dog Warden, Fairfield County Dog Adoption Center & Shelter
Fairfield County

Lee Schrader, DVM, Board Member, OAWF
Executive Director, Fayette Regional Humane Society
Fayette County