TESTIMONY ON OHIO S.B. 205

Presented by Vicki Deisner, Animal Welfare Institute

Before the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

Wednesday, February 5, 2020

Chairman Eklund, Vice-Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary 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 SB 205, 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. Important features of this legislation is the it clarifies the language in Goddard’s Law to make the qualifying offenses clear, it elevates the most serious offenses to an F3 to give judges the discretion to sentence, and it adds a much needed M1 offense for starvation cases.

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; 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.