



Written Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 164
Senate Agricultural & Natural Resources Committee
Colleen Evans, Ohio Animal Welfare Federation
May 25, 2021

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the committee, the Ohio Animal Welfare Federation's (Ohio Fed) Board of Trustees thanks you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on SB 164, legislation to revise the law and penalties associated with companion animal cruelty and to prohibit the destruction of a domestic animal by gas chamber.

I am Colleen Evans, the Executive Director of the Ohio Animal Welfare Federation, formerly the Ohio Federated Humane Societies. Ohio Fed is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose purpose is 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.

Currently, among our members are 30 county humane societies from across the state that also have the authority to enforce Ohio's animal protection laws and will be enforcing the provisions of SB 164 if passed. Ohio passed Goddard's law in 2016 to make knowingly committing an act of serious physical harm against a companion animal a fifth-degree felony. Senate Bill 164 would provide much needed updates to Goddard's Law by better aligning punishment for the most violent, inhumane, knowing acts of companion animal abuse that cause serious injury or death. It also would simplify and clarify language that will help humane agents, other law enforcement agencies, and prosecutors determine whether an act of animal cruelty should be charged as a felony. Despite the malicious and egregious nature of certain violent acts of animal cruelty, they are not currently defined as a violent offense under Ohio's mandatory community control laws. Accordingly, judges are prevented from including prison time as a part of sentencing unless the defendant's past criminal history included a misdemeanor within the past two years or a prior felony. All that leaves as punishment for the depraved torture and ultimate death of a helpless animal is a slap on the wrist in the form of a fine and probation. Senate Bill 164 seeks to change that by increasing penalties and providing judicial discretion in sentencing.

In addition to providing much needed updates to Goddard's Law, Senate Bill 164 seeks to prohibit the destruction of a domestic animal by gas chamber in animal shelters. We wholeheartedly agree that it is time to end this antiquated practice. Thankfully, today animal shelters have access to not only appropriate euthanasia drugs, but those drugs used to sedate an animal pre-euthanasia as well. As a result, the practice of euthanasia by gas chamber is rarely practiced today by Ohio's shelters as there is a safe and more humane alternative that is available to all

animal shelters. Passage of this bill will demonstrate Ohio's support for the humane treatment of animals at all stages of their lives by officially banning the use of any remaining gas chambers now.

We appreciate the work of Senators Hottinger and Yuko to address these issues. As a compassionate society, we need to set a higher legal and moral standard for how we hold one another accountable for such blatant cruelty against living creatures and ensure that the penalty for the act fits the crime. The link between animal abuse and human violence has been well-documented. Treating the most violent, inhumane, knowing acts of companion animal abuse that cause serious injury or death as the violent acts they are is essential if we are to take this link seriously penalize these egregious acts appropriately.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to weigh in on this important legislation.

Approved by the Ohio Animal Welfare Federation Board of Directors:

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