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Testimony to the Senate Agriculture Committee

Substitute House Bill 71

November 14, 2007

By way of introduction, the Ohio Association of Animal Owners is a grassroots organization comprised of over 10,000 members, all of whom strongly support Ohio's animal industry. For the past seventeen years, we have been actively supporting and promoting our mission, which is:

To protect the rights of animal **owners**;

To aid in securing **fair** regulations and legislation; and

To educate animal owners in their responsibility to **animal care** and **public safety**

The OAAO supports the responsible ownership and use of animals and animal products. I am here on our members' behalf to share with this Committee our position on Substitute House Bill 71; and it is my expectation that, as the Senate committee that considers legislation affecting our animal industry, you will understand and support our members' position on this bill.

I have chosen not to tie up the Committee's time by going through Substitute HB71 line by line, as part of your packet should contain a letter from Ohio

Valley Dog Owners dated October 23, 2007, which details specific problems with the substitute bill. The OAAO supports the position of Ohio Valley Dog Owners with respect to the specific objections raised in that letter. It is also our understanding that the Ohio GameFowl Breeders Association has been in contact with many of the members of this Committee, explaining their concerns with the bill. The OAAO supports the position of the Ohio GameFowl Breeders Association with respect to this legislation.

Ordinarily, our organization becomes involved in the hearing process much earlier than we did on this bill. We reviewed House Bill 71 when it was first introduced, and found no problem with it; therefore, we decided not to take a position and not to attend the House committee hearings. Unfortunately, it appears that at the last moment, the bill was hijacked by the animal rights folks; and that version was passed by the House committee and subsequently by the full House, because there was no apparent opposition. I have no doubt that, had our organization and others been present at the House committee hearings, this substitute bill would never have passed Committee.

I personally object to the manner in which this sub-bill was introduced in the House committee. I realize bills are amended and substituted in committee all the time; but the fact that this sub-bill is no longer a dog fighting bill, but is now a companion animal bill and a cockfighting bill, seems to have changed the entire scope and intent of the bill. Plus, it circumvented the process whereby the public is supposed to be made aware of which bills are being heard in committee. It seems to me that this “substitute” bill ought to have been introduced as a **standalone** bill, to be considered on its own merits rather than perverting the intent of a perfectly good dogfighting bill.

The OAAO and the OVDO, along with several other organizations, worked very long and hard (I personally was involved in it since 1992) to secure changes to Ohio’s animal welfare statutes; that work finally came to fruition with the passage of SB221 the end of year 2002, and took effect April 2003. That legislation was no sooner on the books than the animal rights organizations were back in the halls of our statehouse, lobbying for yet more changes to Section 959, still claiming that Ohio doesn’t do enough to protect its animals. I have absolutely no doubt that, even if this Committee were to pass Substitute HB71, the same proponents will be back in the next General Assembly (if not before) with yet another bill, claiming that this one doesn’t do enough. I submit to you today that this sub-bill intentionally perverts the good things that SB221 did; specifically, by gutting ORC Section 959.132.

Our quick-and-easy fix for this legislation would be one of two things:

1. Vote 'no' on Substitute HB71, or
2. Return HB71 to the 'as introduced' version

This bill started out as a simple dog fighting bill, the language of which OAAO would happily support, provided it is UNchanged from its original, as-introduced language. This substitute bill, however, is an undisguised work of the animal rights contingent, and one which the OAAO, and hopefully this Committee, must oppose – no amendments, no compromise. Either return it to the simple dog fighting bill as introduced, or reject it.

The Humane Society of the U.S. (same animal rights organization that has its fingers all over this bill) has already gotten a federal bill (HR3219) introduced that will tighten up dog fighting in **every** state. One of our former Ohio legislators (Betty Sutton) is working with HSUS and leading the battle on that one; I suggest we let them battle it out in Washington D.C. so that it can address dog fighting on a national level and save HSUS the trouble of getting their animal rights bills introduced in one state at a time like Substitute House Bill 71.

Polly Britton