

Barry Reese

Before I start with my testimony today I would like to take this opportunity to thank this committee, the Chairman Tom Caltagirone, and all of the members of the House of Representatives for the hard work, and the courage they have shown in passing HR2525, or what has become known as the "Puppy Mill Bill". I think it is very clear to all involved that this new law will improve the lives of thousands of dogs in Pennsylvania, while improving the image of our state nationally.

Background: I retired from Bureau of Criminal Investigation, of the PA State Police, and career as Director of Special Investigations for a large New York based Life Insurance and Investment Company.

I currently volunteer as the President of the Board of Directors of the Animal Rescue League of Berks County a 501 C3 animal shelter serving all of Berks County for State Dog Law Enforcement and animal control. ARL is also the only shelter in the area handling large animal rescue.

This year our shelter will handle about 10,000 animals, at least ten of those will be horses taken on cruelty complaints. In addition to adoption programs we provide grooming, boarding, low cost or free spay and neuter clinics, community education, low cost vaccine clinics, and have four full-time State Certified Humane Officers handling animal abuse and cruelty investigations, along with various other community programs.

We have nineteen full-time employees and four part-time employees, plus several full-time volunteers. Our shelter is located on ten acres and includes a barn, barnyard, state of the art surgery center, crematorium, maintenance buildings, kennels, cat room, critter room, cat & dog quarantine areas, kennel kitchen, office space, and a newly built 5,000 square foot addition that houses additional offices, our reception area, waiting room, and public

education room. We are currently renovating the existing building, updating and adding kennels and additional cat spaces, replacing chain link fence through out the shelter, and investigating the possibility of installing a wind turbine to generate our own electricity. This along with other “green” actions we have taken will lessen our carbon footprint, and save some money.

As you can imagine the annual operating budget for such an operation is in excess of \$1.3 million, while our additions and renovations are budgeted at another \$1.4 million. It seems like I spend most of my time trying to find the funds to keep us operating and providing the high level of service that has become our trademark in the community.

The service that is the highest profile is our animal abuse and cruelty investigations. They also seem to be the most likely to cause us legal problems, consume the most time, tie up kennel space or barn stalls for the longest periods of time, and expose the shelter to the greatest liability risks.

Coming from a criminal investigative and law enforcement background I know that there is nothing that can be done to speed the judicial process. Search Warrants and investigations take time, hearings get continued, court dockets are full and cases get delayed. That is all part of the system.

What should not be part of the system is the threat of civil suits hanging over the heads of the Humane Officers and the shelters they work for. I know at the Animal Rescue League we spend extra funds each year to purchase liability coverage that provides coverage for our Humane Officers including an attorney to represent them if they were to be sued for doing their jobs.

This pending legislation can remove the threat of civil suit from Humane Officers, while still rightfully holding them responsible to act in a lawful, unbiased, and reasonable manner.

I know that our Humane Officers continually update their knowledge, clear investigations, with our executive director (who is also a Humane Officer), and seek the advice of the local District Attorney. They also treat the people being investigated with respect and will more times than not forgo some criminal charges if they can get the suspect to sign the animals being abused over to the Animal Rescue League. After all the welfare of the animals is every one's main concern.

Having said all of this I reviewed this pending bill with all of our Humane Officers before I appeared here today. They are all very much in favor of this bill being passed. One of them had been sued, while working for another shelter, and had to hire her own attorney, while the shelter also hired an attorney to defend against the suit. As it turned out the suit was only filed to be used as a trade off for a deal in the criminal charges.

Immunity would prevent these trades during plea bargains and pleas would be based on the charges filed, the facts, and what is best for the animals involved. Not to mention stopping the unneeded expenditure of much needed funds by the shelters.

I thank you for your time and attention.