

129<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly  
House Criminal Justice Committee  
March 16, 2011

House Bill 25  
Proponent Testimony

My name is Phyllis Carlson-Riehm and I am representing ACTION OHIO Coalition For Battered Women, a statewide domestic violence coalition. I am speaking in support of House Bill 25 because it addresses several issues that are critical in family violence situations.

Domestic violence is all about power and control. An abuser wants total and complete power and control over a victim. Victims learn what they are allowed to do and what they must not do to incite the anger of their abuser; but, of course, even if victims follow every rule in the book, abusers will still torment them just because they can and that's the game they play.

With my testimony today, I have included for members of the committee a copy of what is referred to as the Power and Control Wheel. This graphic identifies the many ways in which an abusive person manipulates and torments a victim. One of those ways is through threats of abuse to pets, as well as actual physical acts of violence to pets.

Dr. Frank Ascione at Utah State University has documented in his studies the fact that victims often delay leaving abusers because there are pets in the household and they fear what will become of them if they leave. As long as victims stay in the household, they can act as a protector of the pets. Family pets are a great source of support to family members, especially at times of stress. Pets provide unconditional love and companionship. If someone is experiencing hostility and abuse, the comfort of a pet can help them survive emotionally.

With the passage of House Bill 25, victims will be able to include companion pets in protection orders. This will give some victims incentive to leave the abuse. They will have some assurance that they will be able to keep the pet with them – that the abuser cannot take the pet away.

Several researchers in Florida have also documented the role of animal abuse in domestic violence as well as in cases of child abuse and other criminal acts. Researchers have established that juveniles who commit animal cruelty are often products of a violent home where they have witnessed abuse and/or were victims of abuse themselves. Furthermore, researchers have found that if juveniles who abuse animals are corrected as juveniles, they are capable of stopping the behavior and not continuing down that path. If juveniles abuse animals and there is no course correction, it is very likely that they will commit violent acts against people as adults. This has been documented repeatedly through interviews with criminals, including serial killers.

House Bill 25 provides for the evaluation and counseling of juvenile animal abusers, which could be critical to changing the direction of a child or teenager and providing needed help to cope with trauma that the child has experienced. It may also provide the means to identifying families where abuse is the norm and triggering help for the family.

Thank you for the opportunity to express these views. I hope you will support passage of this important legislation.

Phyllis L. Carlson-Riehm  
Executive Director  
ACTION OHIO Coalition For Battered Women