

Dear Chairman Laslovich:

I apologize for not being able to attend tomorrow's hearing.

Thank you for holding a hearing on HB 726 that will add definitions and criteria for the growing issue that continues to perplex our County Sheriff's offices and court rooms. Animal Hoarding is a complex issue and this legislation will help our prosecutorial and judicial systems to address those individuals that hoard living creatures in situations that are not truly in the best interest of the animals.

I am writing both as the Legislative Chair of the Montana Animal Care Association and our sixty plus member agencies, and in my position as the regional director for the 13,000 Montana members of The Humane Society of The United States Northern Rockies Regional Office in Billings. Both our agencies have experienced problems with dealing with individuals who hoard/collect large volumes of animals, when there appears to be no minimum level of care, or the physical resources to provide needed care. In the past decade this issue has transformed away from the old stereotypical "cat lady" and become a real animal welfare and resource issue with current cases in four Montana Counties. Two cases in Bitterroot County and Carbon County has cost local nonprofit's in excess of \$70,000 for temporary care and custody of evidence for local law enforcement. Yet the prosecutors and courts do not have the tools to identify, process and recommend treatment for the humans who amass these collections of animals.

HB 726 is an incremental improvement to helping all agencies address this growing community issue and will help establish a useful option to deal with the cases that do not fall under the normal cruelty definitions.

We are also asking the Judiciary committee to consider reducing the numerical limit from the 20 the house passed to the original draft wording of 10.

The lower number does not imply that anyone owning 10 animals is a hoarder --- because the suspect would also have to meet subsections B, C AND D to be considered a potential hoarder with this statute. The lower number is requested because :

1). IT allows for early intervention when the suspect meets the other three criteria and because hoarder generally do not spay or neuter it is preferred to deal with fewer pregnant animals or nursing litters.

2) Nationally hoarders have a 100 percent recidivism rate... and so suspects that have already been charged cruelty or other crimes OR those that work with social services to voluntarily depopulate their animal collections probably will start over and we need to be able to intervene when they have not amassed as many as twenty breeding animals. For twenty breeding animals can turn into over 100 animal victims in just 63 days (gestation period of dogs/cats)

So thank you in advance for your consideration of moving this discussion to the senate floor and helping the animal and law enforcement agencies throughout Montana to gain an additional tool to address this challenging issue.

Sincerely,

Dave Pauli,
Montana Animal Care Association Legislative Issues Chair
HSUS Northern Rockies Regional Director for MT, AK, CO, ID, ND, SD, UT and WY.