

March 14, 2013

House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
900 Court Street
State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Re: House Bill 2783

Dear Chair Witt and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on House Bill 2783. My name is Mike Oswald. I am the Director of Multnomah County Animal Services. Our mission is to protect the health, safety and welfare of people and pets in Multnomah County.

Sadly, animal abuse, neglect and mistreatment continue to be a serious problem in all of our communities across Oregon. Last year in Multnomah County alone, animal services officers investigated 691 cases of reported animal neglect and abuse.

Of those investigations, 106 cases involved dogs being tethered in a manner that allowed the dog to become dangerously entangled or being left for periods of time that could jeopardize the dog's welfare. A typical case, usually reported by a concerned neighbor, involves a dog that is often underweight and is tied on a short tether 24 hours a day. It's unable to reach food or water, unable to get away from its own feces and unable to get out of the weather--if a dog house is present, the dog is either unable to reach it or unable to fit inside.

HB 2783 creates the offense of unlawful tethering, and creates a crime of animal neglect if a person tethers an animal in a manner that results in serious injury or death. The bill establishes a 10-hour time limit for tethering to stationary objects and a 15-hour limit on a zip line or trolley systems. The Bill adds definitions for "adequate bedding" and "adequate shelter" to the statute. The proposed language will clarify, clearly define and strengthen the statute related to criminal animal neglect resulting from unlawful tethering.

In the 1990's, Multnomah County Commissioners adopted an ordinance similar to the language proposed in HB 2783 to specifically address the problem of dogs being tethered in inhumane conditions. The County code regulates two practices concerning tethering dogs. The first states that: "It is unlawful for any person to permit any dog to be tethered for more than 10 hours in a 24-hour period." (Multnomah County Code 13.305(B)(14)) The second County code states that: "It is unlawful for any person to...permit any dog to be tethered in a manner or method that allows the animal to become entangled for a period of time detrimental to the animals' well-being." (Multnomah County Code 13.305(B)(15) The county code regulates tethering as a violation.

Enforcing the tethering ordinance in Multnomah County has enabled animal services officers to safeguard animal welfare. Animal services officers have authority to investigate cases, take enforcement action when violations are observed, and rescue dogs that are in life-threatening circumstances. Although the 10-hour tethering time limit can be challenging to enforce, in the last eight years, Multnomah County animal services officers took enforcement action on 44 tethering-related violations—and rescued dozens of dogs in life-threatening situations.

The adoption of HB 2783 will enable animal control and animal services officers across the state to conduct timely animal welfare investigations for unlawfully tethered dogs. This law will improve the care and welfare of dogs and can literally mean the difference between life and death for dogs tethered in life-threatening circumstances.

Sincerely,

Mike Oswald, Director
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