



Date: April 3, 2019

To: Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair

From: Sharon Harmon
President and CEO, Oregon Humane Society

Re: Senate Bill 883

Established in 1868, the Oregon Humane Society is the state’s largest and oldest animal welfare organization with over 50,000 supporters statewide. We are not affiliated with any local or national organization. **We are here today to ask you to support SB 883.**

In the last decade there has been a tremendous increase in the underground pet railroad. There are thousands of animals moving through these nontraditional groups in Oregon. The public never gets to visit and without public funding there is no accountability—these rescues fly under the radar in every sense. For some it is a profit driven practice, dogs go for upwards of \$400 and in many cases well-funded groups in other states pay for the transport to Oregon, the individuals running these rescues get a large pay off for little expense. It is a cash business; the transaction mirrors that of the drug trade with purchasers meeting dealers in parking lots or the mall.

This isn’t to say most rescues are bad. Specialty rescues, for example, do amazing work and save lives that traditional shelters cannot. Some of those groups spend thousands of dollars on each pet, provide superior care, and find lifelong homes for pets at risk. But more and more “rescues” eventually get off track, can’t pay the bills, can’t come to terms with the fact that it is impossible to save every at risk animal. When these underground rescues start to struggle with those realities is when they often turn to denial and secrecy. The phenomenon of animal rescue turned rescue hoarder is not too far down the continuum for too many of these groups.

The drive to be “no kill” and the nearly fanatical adherence to the strictest interpretation of the phrase leads some people to believe any life is better than death, even if that means a slow and painful “natural” death through starvation, neglect, untreated injuries and disease. That is what we saw in 2013 when OHS assisted Marion Co. Sheriff’s Office with the execution of a warrant at a warehouse leased by Willamette Animal Rescue. OHS took in over 100 sick and starving dogs that night and the citizens of Oregon were outraged that an animal rescue could hide and neglect so many dogs for as long as they did. In response to this case, the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill 6 which included a statewide animal rescue licensing requirement to be implemented at the county level (ORS 609.415/420).



It has been six years since Senate Bill 6 became law and, from what we can determine, only four counties have taken the necessary steps to implement the licensing plan for animal rescues. Many counties do not have the resources to implement and enforce the requirements of ORS 609.415 and instead do nothing to regulate or oversee the business of animal rescue in their areas.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture, through the State Veterinarian, is the appropriate agency to take on this responsibility. Using an agency with statewide jurisdiction to implement a licensing scheme for animal rescue entities would result in more uniform standards and processes, and consistency in enforcement.

This model has been tested and found to be necessary and successful in Colorado. Just this past March the Colorado Department of Agriculture revoked the license of an animal rescue that had contracted with Pueblo City. An inspection by the State found multiple animals deceased, animals kept in small kennels, improper sanitation, and healthy animals housed with sick animals; essentially this was institutionalized hoarding of animals. The oversight by the Department of Agriculture was the necessary tool to intervene on behalf of the animals and end the suffering immediately by revoking their license (<https://www.fox21news.com/news/local/community-animal-services-of-pueblo-gives-up-license/1882122854>).

Oregon needs to make this change to uncover any existing wrong-doing and prevent “bad actor” animal rescue entities who exploit the vulnerable population the rest are trying to save.

We encourage you to vote ‘yes’ on SB 883.

Sincerely,

Sharon Harmon
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