



Testimony By: Barry Londeree
Presented To: House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry
In Support Of: H.254 to improve adequate shelter for livestock and the ACIAB report for 2019
Date: March 19, 2019

Chair Partridge and Members of the Committee:

My name is Barry Londeree, and I am the Vermont State Director for the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). On behalf of our Vermont members, supporters, and volunteers, I ask for your support of H.254, a bill to clarify the shelter, exercise, and tethering standards for livestock and equines in Vermont, and for efforts such as H.497 to establish sensible regulations for shelters, rescues, and other facilities that provide direct care to domestic pets.

Several years ago, the Vermont Humane Federation helped organize a meeting of equine rescue groups and humane investigators throughout the state to identify common challenges impacting livestock and equine welfare in Vermont. The group included representatives of equine rescue organizations with experience investigating large-animal cruelty complaints.

The group identified several problems with livestock and equine cases, including insufficient Vermont statutes regarding access to shelter and care standards for equines and livestock. Specific cases were discussed involving horses having to stand outside in direct sunlight and humidity, high winds, freezing rain, and hail without the ability to quickly protect themselves. Horses held in confinement for long periods of time with no access to outdoor living areas were also a commonly identified problem.

All participants agreed that the lack of clarity in our laws made the shelter requirements for livestock difficult to understand, communicate and enforce. The lack of a definition for “natural shelter” in particular made that provision challenging to apply to the varying circumstances an investigator may encounter. This is concerning given that data collected from 2008-2015 found that equine-related cases represented nearly 22 percent of all complaints by species, second most behind dogs.

H.254 is the legislative proposal that came out of this meeting and it is intended to fill the gaps in livestock shelter standards identified as deficient. It is not intended to significantly alter or expand the legal protections for livestock and equines, but instead add further specificity to those already in place. The bill would:

1. Provide a definition for adequate “natural” or “constructed” shelter
2. Provide a definition for “proper ventilation”
3. Create a requirement for proper exercise for equines housed continually in a confined area
4. Clarifies standards for the use of a leash, rope, or chain on livestock

I also want to make clear our support for the recommendations of the 2019 report to the legislature by the Animal Cruelty Investigations Advisory Board. Most critically, this report calls for the registration and oversight of animal shelters, rescues, and other care facilities in order to ensure compliance with animal welfare regulations and protect the interests of consumers. Currently, the state's animal shelters and rescues do not have to even register with the state and receive no inspection. Consumers have no recourse when they encounter problems with a shelter or rescue. With no ability to conduct routine inspections, often problems within a facility are not uncovered until the situation has become a criminal investigation, long past when it would be most opportune to intervene. I strongly encourage this Committee to consider H.497 and other measures that would create a reasonable regulatory framework for organizations that provide care for our pets.

In closing, I ask that you advance H.254 to improve shelter standards for livestock and support efforts to enact much-needed oversight of animal shelters and rescue organizations. Thank you for your kind attention to these issues.

Barry Londeree
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The Humane Society of the United States