Thank you Mr. Speaker for allowing me to present House Bill 147 which would update the Ohio Revised Code relating to humane societies and their agents. This legislation will not only bring the code up to date with current humane society practices, but it will also ensure public accountability for these organizations and their agents. House Bill 147 is the culmination of nearly four years of work, two bills in the 131st General Assembly, and nearly twenty different working versions of this legislation.

House Bill 147 takes many steps to update the revised code regarding Humane Society Law, the appointment of Humane Agents and the use of Special Prosecutors. Major changes include:

* Requires each county humane society, and the Ohio Humane Society, to submit an annual report of enforcement activities to the appropriate county sheriff.
* Specifies that generally the records of an enforcement activity by a humane society agent are public records under Ohio Public Records Law.
* Prohibits a humane society from entering into written agreement not to prosecute a person for an alleged violation of law unless the agreement has been reviewed and approved by a judge.
* Specifies procedures for the removal from office of a humane society agent for “just cause.”
* Specifies that a humane society agent is a "public servant" for the purposes of bribery law and is therefore subject to the criminal statute on bribery.
* Expands the current law, which governs the seizure and impoundment of companion animals, to apply to the seizure and impoundment of any animal when related to a violation of domestic animal law.
* Requires that the written notice, which the impounding officer must provide to the owner, be given not later than 24 hours after the animal was seized and impounded - - current law is silent on the timing of such notice.
* Modifies the law governing the amount of bond that a court may determine must be provided by the owner of the animal for the care of the animal during impoundment using a “necessary and reasonable” standard.
* Increases the monthly salary of humane agents for the first time since 1953. We have also built in raises, occurring every 5 years, to offset inflation.
* HB 147 updates the humane law, so that Humane Societies are solely focused on animal cases. Specifically, the bill eliminates the authority for these special attorneys to prosecute violations of law relating to child abuse, employment of a child under 14 years of age and “neglect or refusal of an adult to support a destitute parent.” While Humane Agents will remain mandatory reporters of child abuse, in summary, Humane Societies will no longer be permitted to prosecute child abuse cases, or any case related to humans.
* HB 147 also gives County Commissioners the flexibility to pay for the Humane Agents and appointed prosecuting attorneys of animal abuse cases out of the general fund or the dog and kennel fund, as they so choose.

Proponents for these various provisions have included the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association, and the Ohio Judicial Conference. Substitute House Bill 147 was voted out of the House Civil Justice Committee unanimously.

I would like to thank House Civil Justice Committee Chairman Jim Butler for his assistance in the committee process, my aide, Brandon Sagraves, for his work on the bill; as well as Dan DeSantis, who has done Yeoman’s work in crafting the language; the Cleveland APL for their willingness to work through their issues with the bill, and the various associations and individuals who have given their input to this important legislation.

Thank you Mr. Speaker, and I urge a yes vote.