

Testimony Concerning Raised Bill 5399
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Coalition for Change

Dear Members of the Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Raised Bill 5399, An Act Concerning the Euthanizing of Animals by the Connecticut Humane Society.

I am the founder and spokesperson for the Coalition for Change, the group (approximately 175 members) responsible for all recent reform efforts at the CT Humane Society (CHS). I have had many different jobs within the animal industry such as: a municipal ACO, Animal Curator at a large nature center, veterinary technician/assistant at an Animal Hospital, technician at a research facility as well as an animal pathology lab, and in 2009, as the Humane Educator for CHS. I have a BS in Animal Science and Pathology from UCONN.

For many years (close to 20) I had heard many rumors about CHS. Due to heavy contact with others in the state's animal community, CHS came up often. It is CT's oldest, largest, and wealthiest animal shelter. I believe their endowment is approximately 60 million dollars at this time. I always payed attention to what I heard but since I was neither an employee nor volunteer of the organization, I never really did anything about it because I lacked first hand knowledge. All of that changed in March of 2009.

I was hired to be the Humane Educator. Almost immediately it was evident that the Society had major organizational and management problems. Within a couple of weeks I became increasingly suspicious about the operations 'downstairs'. I was considered 'administrative' staff so my work space was upstairs. All of the direct animal care and contact with the public takes place in the lower level. I was not allowed to spend time downstairs, even though I asked repeatedly to be allowed to volunteer but due to one of the society's many policies, this was not allowed until a certain amount of time had gone by. Even though the downstairs staff faced enormous daily challenges that directly impacted animal care and in fact made it almost impossible for the society to fulfill their mission statement, I was still not allowed to help (even with the many kittens needing trained bottle feeders).

Finally, my job changed due to teaching the Kindness Club, a summer youth program. I was now downstairs (or outside) all day, every day. I was able to observe many areas in the shelter on a daily basis. What I saw, heard, and learned led me to form the Coalition as well as organizing the workers to join the Machinists Union. The Coalition began with just me initially but slowly our numbers grew. The Machinists Union met with employees for the first time in September (2009) and petitioned CHS on October 23, 2009.

It is somewhat overwhelming to try to organize and describe all of the concerns the members of the Coalition share about CHS. Our group is made up of past and present employees, volunteers, donors, and members of the general public. Even though we were threatened with litigation for bringing these concerns to light, we pressed on. I guess I should start with the behavioral euthanasias.

Countless animals have been killed at CHS for what is referred to as 'behavioral' concerns. There are two types of euthanasias: behavioral and medical. This document will deal with behavioral euthanasias only. Some examples of behavioral issues: food bowl aggression, dog aggression, barrier (cage) aggression, resource guarding (snapping at people or other dogs over a toy), etc. Many potentially great pets (cats, dogs, rabbits, ferrets, etc) were killed due to the managers and 'behaviorists' making the determination that these animals could not be rehabilitated. Once the decision had been made by these unqualified and inexperienced managers/workers (most of whom lacked the proper credentials to be making these life and death decisions) the animal was euthanized. The vast majority of times, it was CHS animal care/behavior/team leader/ employees performing these behavioral euthanasias. I am sure they were not veterinarians and/or veterinary technicians. We heard about dogs that had to be 'wrestled to the ground' or 'stabbed in the neck' by those performing the euthanasias. We also heard about a cat that was drowning in its water bowl because the person involved in the euthanasia had forgotten to remove the water after the cat had been tranquilized. Some animals are given a sedative first if they are difficult to restrain. If the water bowl is not removed, the animal can fall into it and not be able to lift itself out.....

There are many examples about the struggles involved in the euthanasia process. Many employees have heard these incidents directly from those performing the euthanasias. However, the employees are still working under the managers that were appointed by the former President. These managers

were hand picked because of their loyalty to him. Even though he has resigned, these top managers remain in their positions. Most, if not all, lack management training and credentials. Most lack any type of formal education, at least when it comes to animal behavior, animal health, and/or shelter operations. At least seven (7) employees (and one volunteer) have been terminated in the past year. All (except 1) were Coalition members and Union supporters. Many of the remaining employees have been written up, disciplined, and demoted. These dedicated employees continue to work for extremely low wages within a culture of continued fear and intimidation. I am in regular contact with a number of them (as well as some volunteers) and they have told me that the fear of losing their jobs is preventing them from testifying today. Members of the medical department were told (by a top manager) if they had any further contact with the Coalition they would be terminated immediately. Obviously, watching 7 of their co-workers get fired has made a very real and lasting impression upon them. Their concern is legitimate. Because of all of this they have asked me to speak for them.

Please know that the members of the Coalition, who bravely came forward to make their concerns public, continue to try to improve the CHS. The resistance is huge. There does seem to be a number of changes in certain policies and procedures but because the Society is a private charity, much remains secret. The Coalition is concerned that without proper supervision and/or legislation, things can very quickly return to the way it was for decades. Members of our group have wanted to assist the Society in many of these new reforms, programs, etc. but as you can imagine, we have been excluded from all of that.

I also need to mention that our work led to an investigation by the Attorney General's office (which is on-going to the best of my knowledge), inspections and fines from OSHA, a trial between the Machinist Union and the CHS BOD/managers at the NLRB (decision is pending), an investigation by the Legislators for Animal Advocacy, and numerous other reforms.

We feel that it is inexcusable for donated money to be spent on high-priced attorneys to fight the wishes of the employees. We also realize that since the workers are 'at will employees', they can be terminated at any time for any reason. Since the Society has fired so many of our original supporters, their tactic is obviously to destroy the attempt by the employees to organize (even though it is their civil right to do so).

We also feel that the Society needs more staff, especially properly trained and experienced individuals who will be directly involved with all aspects of animal care. The animals do not get the care they need and with such a huge endowment, there is really no excuse for this.

In addition, there is a huge programmatic failure at this organization. The Society should be a leader in all animal welfare and humane education programs. Again, with the amount of money the Society has, it is hard to understand. Most non-profits are restricted because of a constant lack of operational funds. The CHS prefers to pay attorneys to fight the union (since December, 2009) instead of putting donated dollars into programs that directly benefit the animals in their care, *and* provide a *decent* living wage to the employees that are on the front lines of shelter work (the lower level animal care workers/adoption counselors/ vet techs. and assistants/ etc.)

The CT Humane Society was founded in 1881 (2011 is its 130th anniversary) by a Hartford High School Senior, Gertrude Lewis (an 18 year old girl). The Coalition wants the Society to live up to its mission statement which states: "The purpose of the Society is to promote humanity and kindness, and to prevent cruelty to man and animals, by information, statistics, appropriate literature, and by all lawful means which they may deem wise and best, and by assisting in prosecution of crimes of a cruel and inhumane nature; and generally to encourage justice and humanity and to discourage injustice and inhumanity". It is shameful that the Coalition had to form to get them to *begin* to do this. It is also shameful that legislation has to occur to ensure that the animals in the Society's care receive certain basic rights to guarantee humane treatment (even during euthanasia).

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

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