

Monday, March 17, 2014



TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF SECTION 2 OF RAISED BILL NO. 5416

Raised Bill No. 5416 – An act establishing a livestock care standards advisory council and prohibiting the use of certain enclosures for gestating sows.

The National Pork Producers Council, which works on behalf of pork producers and other industry stakeholders throughout the United States to ensure that the industry remains a consistent and responsible supplier of high-quality pork throughout the nation and the world, **opposes Section 2 of this legislation.**

While this proposal may be well-intentioned, imposing this prohibition would contradict years of science-based animal welfare advancements, informed public opinion, and the views of the nation's leading veterinary organizations.

Pig farmers are committed to continuous improvement and have nothing to gain by using a housing system that causes harm to sows or their piglets. Over the last 50 years, the way pigs are raised has changed – for the betterment of both the animals and consumers. Advancements in farming methods, technology and economics have significantly transformed farming. Yet one thing remains constant for farmers: our mission to produce safe, nutritious food in a responsible manner. On farms large and small, our livelihoods are tied to the land and to the health of animals in our care. We realize that raising healthy pigs by using good farming practices results in safe, high-quality products. Huge strides in farm design, animal handling practices and veterinary medicine have enhanced pigs' health and comfort. America's pig farmers have long been proactive in funding and advocating for improved practices, new technology and research, and ongoing training and education for people responsible for animal care. Today's farmers, in collaboration with veterinarians and other agricultural experts, are more knowledgeable and better equipped than ever to effectively care for the health and well-being of their pigs. As part of continuous improvement, group housing was abandoned, by many farmers, in the middle of the last century to remedy issues of aggression and competition for food. Today more than 75 percent of the pigs raised in the United States are raised with the use of gestation stalls.

Decisions on welfare associated with sow housing are not a simple choice between a gestation stall and group housing. Many factors, such as pen configuration, flooring type, feeding system, nutrition program, grouping strategy, timing of grouping, pig flow, husbandry skills, genetics and others, come together to influence the success of a housing system. Removing the use of gestation stalls would hinder the ability of pig farmers to properly care for their livestock and potentially cause an increase in the price of pork.

Both the American Association of Swine Veterinarians (AASV) and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) recognize that animal welfare is based not only on how an animal

is housed but on a host of factors. These include overall livestock management practices, feeding systems, other environmental features and even the individual sow.¹

Among its conclusions, the AVMA found:

“Given the number of variables and large variation in performance within both group and stall systems for pregnant sows, no one system is clearly better than others under all conditions and according to all criteria of animal welfare.”

In short, this proposal may not provide benefits for the animal, but it could endanger the health of the sow and her unborn piglets.

Proponents of this legislation claim the general public overwhelmingly agrees with banning gestation stalls. However, a poll conducted by ORC International in Massachusetts showed that **when both sides of the issue are presented** in a fair and balanced format **68 percent of the respondents support the use of gestation stalls.**

This also serves a larger point: *Animal husbandry standards should not be codified in state statute.* Farmers must be able to adapt their animal husbandry practices based on the latest science and veterinary research – not upon the whims of animal rights activists, as the safety of our food supply depends on it. Putting standards in law that may or may not reflect the latest knowledge and best management practices is simply irresponsible.

Similar bans in other countries demonstrate that when sow housing has been banned, the cost of pork has gone up, and pig farmers have been forced out of business. Farmers must be able to adapt their animal management practices based on a wide variety of factors, not only on the latest veterinary and technical advice, but also on what is economically viable.

A ban on gestation stalls for sows is unnecessary, unscientific, against public opinion and will have a dramatic, negative impact on pig farmers and, consequently, pork consumers. For these reasons, the National Pork Producers Council asks that no favorable action be taken on this legislation.

¹ American Veterinary Medical Association, *Pregnant Sow Housing* (June 2005), <https://www.avma.org/Advocacy/StateAndLocal/Pages/pregnant-sow-housing.aspx>