

Testimony Concerning HB 5707
Environment Committee, March 20, 2015
Brian and Nicole Waicunas

I would like to thank the Environment Committee for the opportunity to express my support of HB5707 defining “proper shelter for dogs” .

It is 2:20am on 2/18/15. My old school mercury thermometer outside my kitchen window reads -2 degrees Fahrenheit. I’m guessing it will drop more by dawn (two mornings ago it was 12 below at 5am and through this everyone knows that Shadow is in an old cattle barn with no heat. Are my wife and I the only ones who think about this when the temperature is extreme? I hope this is not entirely true, but I have trouble seeing it any other way. Gandhi says that “The greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are being treated.” I wonder what Gandhi would think about 61 River Road.

I spoke with the first selectwoman yesterday, at length, about this issue. She seems like a nice person and I appreciated her taking the time to listen to me. I say that we spoke but I realize that she didn’t say a whole lot in comparison to how much I spoke. I’ve become quite used to this; I think this mostly because everyone that I talk to has little to say to my points, facts, and opinions. I will not state the obvious on this other than to say that everyone agrees with almost everything I say when they do respond and I get a lot of silence and long pauses after my statements. My goal was to keep this brief, but that is impossible.

I want to say that I am not college educated and I think this point is pertinent because all human beings (educated, uneducated, low IQ, high IQ, financially well-off, and the opposite) will agree that this situation is wrong. Where is the moral compass?

How can a dog be left in this condition in a state with so much wealth and so many educated people? I’m not trying to single out this town as there are dogs just like Shadow in most, if not all towns, but I’d prefer to stay a little naïve so that I can hold on to some hope for humanity.

This town just happens to be a victim of circumstance; maybe it was meant to be so that we could help to confront this issue because it needs to be confronted. I would like to think that people would not want to have Shadow suffering in their town – what message does it send to the citizens who reside there, not to mention the children: that this is the way to treat an animal? In my dealing with everyone: The ACO, the first selectwoman, I feel that I have been vilified and I know that this is true. The dog warden sent State Troopers to my house. She exaggerated the situation in order to avoid dealing with the true problem: a dog who is not being properly cared for in her town. I still have the four texts that I sent to her and I will show them to anyone, anytime.

I have received phrases and words from the town office like “there are probably worse-off dogs in Stafford” and “Why did you go to the media?” When I called the town office for the second time in three weeks, I was asked, “Why are you calling all the time?” On another occasion, I was laughed at when describing the plight of Shadow. All of these responses have confused and

disheartened me. I was hoping for elected officials to provide an effort to solve the problem, and to look for a solution, but the response has been, “There is nothing we can do,” “That’s too bad,” and “What do you want *us* to do?”

There seems to be widespread apathy regarding the plight of creatures who have no voice. The ACO uses verbiage like “enduring” and “withstanding” conditions when discussing the plight of Shadow.

In terms of pack mentality, dogs need socialization. To deprive a dog of regular interaction with other dogs, or, if other dogs are not available, with their pack leader (the owner) is psychological torture. It is the equivalent of depriving a child of a basic need. A dog has the intelligence and psychology of a three to five year old child – so – that need is being deprived of that animal for its entire life. If anyone is unaware of pack mentality, please, google it and educate yourself as this is a whole other issue that is being ignored in the case of Shadow.

Linda Winters, from the State Agricultural Department said to me, on the phone “I believe that the isolation is more cruel than the exposure to the cold.”

Shadow has both.

You can tell me that the ACO is working hard, going above and beyond. She hasn’t communicated anything to my wife, who has texted her twice in a week and a half – just asking if Shadow is ok – so how would we know?

I drove by Shadow at 1:30pm on Monday. It was 12 degrees with a steady wind. Shadow was laying on her concrete slab. As I slowed down she lifted her head to see me. This was the day after the last storm. All the media was saying how dangerously cold it was and that, the cold, combined with the high winds made it treacherous for anyone to be outside. They also said to ***bring in your pets.***

What about Shadow?

It is now 3:26am and I need to get some sleep so that I can get up at 5 to go to work.

Dog pounds are heated.

Kennels are required to be heated.

What about Shadow?

Everyone talks of worse dogs elsewhere, diverting and deflecting so that they don’t have to help the dog who is right in front of them. I am not satisfied with the status quo. My wife drives by Shadow twice a day. She has also diverted her trip by an additional ten miles to avoid seeing her, but she can’t bear to not check on her, daily. It should not affect her? Really? She should ignore her, like everyone else? That is an impossible request.

In the one and a half hours that I have been writing, the temperature has dropped two degrees. It is now -4 and it is still not the coldest time of the morning which occurs right before sunup. So many more difficult tasks have been accomplished throughout history. I find it hard to believe that it has taken this long to help this one dog.

Be creative. Be diligent. Work hard for what's right and do not ignore her anymore.

6:10am: 8 below 0. My emotions and frustration are at an all-time high. I cry for Shadow most mornings. This morning, yes.

Make this right. Create a law that does not allow this man to isolate this dog and dogs just like her. Create a law that does not make it legal for him and those like him to keep her in conditions that could potentially kill her, and, at best, leave her living a life of misery. Create a law that allows for ACOs to become educated on the social and emotional conditions of animals so that they can better take care of those animals and people in their communities.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify and I do hope you will strongly support this important piece of legislation.

Thank you,

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