



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

**Testimony in Support of SB 356, 357, and 358
House Judiciary Committee
January 26, 2012**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I thank you for hearing testimony on SB 356, 357, and 358, legislation to facilitate the prosecution of dogfighting cases. My name is Jill Fritz and I am the Michigan state director for The Humane Society of the United States. On behalf of our 370,000 members and constituents in Michigan, I come in strong support of all three bills.

SB 356 would allow the forfeiture of real property used in the commission of animal fighting; SB 357 allows property on which animal fighting is conducted to be declared a nuisance; and SB 358 amends Michigan's anti-racketeering law (RICO) to add "A Violation of Section 49, Concerning Animal Fighting" to crimes considered racketeering activity. Allowing the forfeiture and sale of property owned by animal fighters will provide invaluable resources for law enforcement in ultimately purging this bloody, criminal activity from our state.

Aside from the obvious cruelty of organized dogfighting, there are considerable public safety concerns. Dogfighting does not occur in a vacuum: Narcotics, illegal gambling, firearms, and even homicide go hand in hand with animal fighting operations. Rarely do law enforcement officers find a dogfighting operation that does not also host other serious criminal activities, all of which drastically impact community safety.

There is ample empirical evidence supporting this. For example, a study conducted between 2001 and 2004 by the Chicago Police Department found "a startling propensity for offenders charged with crimes against animals to commit other violent offenses toward human victims." Among other things, the study found that 70% of those arrested for animal crimes had also been arrested for other felonies, 65% had past arrests for battery, and 70% had been arrested for illegal narcotics.

SB 356, 357, and 358 would help deter potential dogfighting crimes by creating penalties that offset any financial gains to be made from operating a dogfighting enterprise. It will give prosecutors the tools they need to mete out adequate penalties to stop this violent, criminal activity.

Adding certain dogfighting-related crimes to the list of offenses considered "racketeering" under Michigan's racketeering law makes sense if we are to make the punishment for dogfighting fit the crime. The leader of a dogfighting network should be held accountable as the organizer of staged animal abuse and torture. When one looks at the security measures employed to avoid detection by law enforcement, and the network of dog registries, magazines, transport services to move breeding females to dogfighting kennels, and the massive amounts of money gambled, one can only conclude that yes, dogfighting networks are organized crime networks.

The bloodlust and gambling that fuel dogfighting activity should not be tolerated in a civilized, humane society. The case for passage of SB 356, 357, and 358 is strong, and I urge committee members to please vote yes on all three bills. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

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