

Testimony of Terry Kukor, Ph.D., ABPP (Forensic)
House Bill 25
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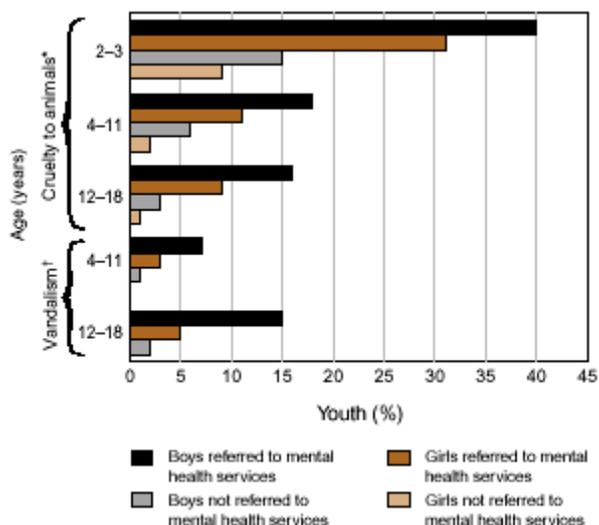
Testimony Given Before The Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee
May 25, 2011

Good morning Chairman Slaby and members of the Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 25. My name is Terry Kukor, Ph.D. I am the Director of Forensic Services at Netcare, a not-for-profit provider of crisis intervention and behavioral health assessment services in Columbus, Ohio. I hold academic appointments in the Departments of Psychology at Miami (Ohio) University and Drexel University, and I am one of about 270 psychologists nationally that have been board-certified in forensic psychology by the American Board of Professional Psychology. I have been doing forensic evaluations of adults and juveniles for almost 25 years, and in that time I have evaluated hundreds of violent individuals. Based upon my professional qualifications and experiences, I was invited to present testimony to you today by the Ohio Psychological Association. The opinions that I will share with you today are my own and do not carry the endorsement of any agency or institution with which I am affiliated other than OPA.

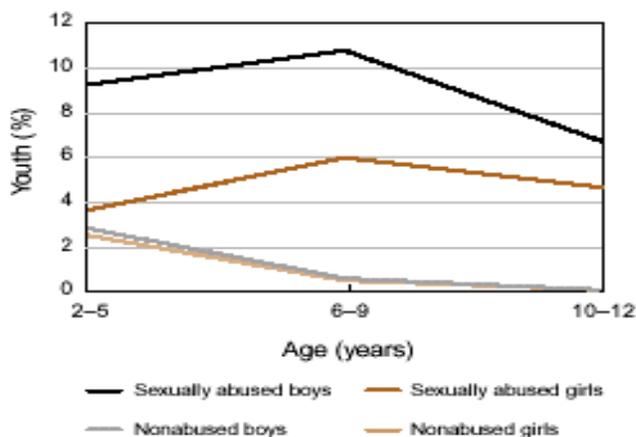
House Bill 25 will allow the Court to require psychological assessment for juveniles who have been adjudicated for animal cruelty. These assessments, which will be done by mental health professionals with specialized training, may recommend a variety of risk-reduction interventions. This bill addresses the well-documented link in the scientific literature between animal cruelty and serious emotional and behavioral problems in youth. To briefly summarize this research, many studies have shown that children's acts of animal abuse are some of the strongest and earliest diagnostic indicators of conduct disorder, a serious behavioral disorder that often progresses into a life-long pattern of antisocial behavior (Ancione 2001). The social consequences of such untreated disorders are, in a word, grim. Half of school shooters had a history of animal cruelty (Verlinden, Henson and Thomas, 2000). Case histories of serial killers indicate that many exhibited animal cruelty as juveniles (Peterson & Farrington, 2007). More commonly, individuals who abuse animals as juveniles often go on to become perpetrators of domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse. On this point I want to be crystal clear – it's not just the animals we are concerned about, but it's also the children, and eventually spouses and the elderly, that juveniles who abuse animals often go on to hurt.

There is sound scientific evidence for the provisions of House Bill 25. Acione (2001) found that the number of youth who abused animals had a significantly higher rate of referral to mental health services. The following graphs visually display some of the additional findings of this research.

For example, youth who committed vandalism had a much lower rate of need for mental health services as contrasted with youth who abused animals:



Sexually abused youth were also much more likely to abuse animals:



As you can see from this brief review, the problem of animal cruelty is a significant one with consequences that are destructive in a far-reaching manner. Youth who abuse animals are clearly more at risk for serious emotional and behavioral problems (Davis, 1999). Here's the silver lining to this dark cloud. There are effective treatment programs that are specifically tailored to

youth who are abusive to animals (Randour, 1999). These comprehensive intervention models focus on reducing the risk of violence to both animals and people.

Since animal abuse is often an early marker for other serious psychological problems that also have well researched and effective interventions, with early intervention for these youth, the prognosis is promising. This important legislation provides a real opportunity to not only end the needless suffering of innocent animals, but also to provide the tools and opportunity to divert youth from a pathway of serious emotional and behavioral problems and the subsequent high cost of incarceration.

The economic and emotional devastation that ensues when kids who hurt animals also hurt people is huge, and you have before you a significant tool to do something about it. House Bill 25 represents a great opportunity for you to make Ohio a safer and healthier place for youth, their families, and the animals that so enrich our lives. Please don't let this opportunity pass you by.

Thank you for your time and interest. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

Terry Kukor, Ph.D., ABPP (Forensic)

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