

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 762

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & CIVIL JURISPRUDENCE

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Hearing Date: April 21, 2021 8:00 AM

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Austin, TX

Testimony in Support of HB 762

An Act To Protect Animals in Unattended Vehicles

Committee on Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence

April 21, 2021

My name is Lauren Loney and I'm the Texas state director for the Humane Society of the United States. I'm writing today in support of HB 762 and want to thank Representative Israel for filing this bill which would allow Good Samaritans to intervene when an animal is in imminent danger in a hot (or cold) vehicle and when law enforcement has been notified and cannot arrive in time, as minutes do matter when an animal is suffering from heatstroke. First responders on the scene have given accounts of the suffering that a dog left in such conditions can endure. They have described the claw marks left on the door with nail particles still stuck in them made by trapped animals, the contorted body shapes of those desperately trying to get out, and what it looks like when they do not.

This bill would not allow people to haphazardly smash car windows and take animals. Rather it would allow a citizen to intervene and help an animal without fear of liability only if certain steps are taken prior to the rescue, including calling 9-1-1, awaiting their instructions, and waiting for the police to arrive on scene if instructed to do so. The bill provides thoughtful language to better protect animals while preventing vigilantism. Those specific steps are clearly laid out in the bill and are consistent with laws on the books in many other states.

Every year, local law enforcement receives calls from citizens concerned about animals trapped in a parked car on a hot day. Many animal control officers cover multiple towns over a vast area. Additionally, some municipalities may appoint a law enforcement officer who has many other duties to cover animal control responsibilities and may be needed elsewhere when one of these calls comes in. Moreover, Texas has many remote areas where response time could be longer and minutes can make the difference in these situations.

For example, on a 72 degree day, a car's internal temperature can heat up to 116 degrees within an hour. On an 80 degree day, the temperature can shoot up to a sweltering 99 degrees in just ten minutes. Lowering the car's windows has been proven to have minimal effects on a car's temperature. Because of an animal's internal cooling system, humidity in excess of 35% can slow or shut down their ability to evaporate moisture and control their body temperature.

Fourteen states have passed similar legislation with bipartisan support and others are considering similar legislation this year.

Every year, companion animals in Texas die from heatstroke in hot, unattended vehicles and HB 762 strikes a good balance of providing a last resort mechanism to help animals in life-threatening situations while putting in place necessary safeguards to prevent vigilante acts.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass HB 762.

Thank you.

Printed on: April 25, 2021 8:57 AM