

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 1480

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & LIVESTOCK

Hearing Date: March 18, 2021 8:00 AM

Lou Ann Ashmore

Self - Former Elementary School Substitute Teacher - Pandemic Laid off Administrative Assistant in the College System.

Mesquite, TX

Regarding bull hook use on "Working animals". I believe the bill should be fine tuned to separate agriculture animals from wild animals being used for entertainment. Typically elephants and other wild animals must be tortured and/or have food and water withheld in order for them to do the tricks the trainer wants them to do. It is not natural for them to give people rides, stand on one foot or other such tricks. Bull hooks are horrible and elephants are afraid of them. These animals are often not looked after medically as they are seen as money making machines and not living beings. They end up with bad feet, arthritis and painful sores which are not attended to. No animal should have to live like that. Please ban the use of bull hooks on wild animals being used for entertainment purposes. Many other states have already done this giving the small circuses few places to go, which is what's best for the animals. Thank you.

Sandra Whisler

self landowner and teacher

Copperas Cove, TX

The provisions in this bill that relate to "unauthorized control" and "materials" criminalizes common whistleblower activities related to food safety, animal abuse and misleading labeling claims. The public has a right to know if these activities are occurring. Bad actors in any industry should not be protected by preventing reporters or other observers from publishing pictures, videos, or observations they have made at farms or anywhere else. This is an infringement on free speech. Passage of this part of the bill would be an open door for animal abusers, sloppy practices that could endanger the public and lies about food products that cannot be refuted. Please do not allow passage of this section.

Stephanie Putnam

Self Biologist

Austin, TX

Please oppose this bill and continue to protect whistle blowers. Animal cruelty must not be tolerated and those who reveal it should not be punished.

Yanette Carmona

HSUS

Katy, TX

I'm writing today to OPPOSE the ag-gag language in HB 1480. Ag-gag bills accomplish nothing related to protecting property rights or biosecurity in Texas agriculture facilities. These bills are intended to criminalize whistleblowers who are legally present (and often employed by) an agribusiness. Many responsible farmers strongly oppose ag-gag because these measures hurt the reputation of all agriculture. Research shows that learning about ag-gag efforts undermines consumer trust in farmers and animal agriculture in general. I respectfully request that committee vote NO on HB 1480 so long as the bill contains ag-gag language.

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Elizabeth Bodley

Self

Fort Worth, TX

I'm writing today to OPPOSE the ag-gag language in HB 1480. Ag-gag bills accomplish nothing related to protecting property rights or biosecurity in Texas agriculture facilities. These bills are intended to criminalize whistleblowers who are legally present (and often employed by) an agribusiness. Many responsible farmers strongly oppose ag-gag because these measures hurt the reputation of all agriculture. Research shows that learning about ag-gag efforts undermines consumer trust in farmers and animal agriculture in general. I respectfully request that committee vote NO on HB 1480 so long as the bill contains ag-gag language."

Becky Hardin

Self - Student

FLORESVILLE, TX

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nita andersen, ms

Self

Austin, TX

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Terri Palleschi

self

Plano, TX

I absolutely oppose HB 1480. This bill is only to protect the the bad groups that participate in abuse and neglect of agriculture facilities. Whistleblowers are absolutely necessary as there are to many inhumane facilities. The Ag-gag bills have been presented in many states and have been opposed for this very reason. Thank you

maribel perez

self

arlington, TX

i oppose this stupid bill

Melanie Lawrence

Self

Austin, TX

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Any Bill that wants to keep this barbaric Bull hook for elephants legal is absolutely terrible. Please do not allow this as these creatures should be protected and not tortured and abused. Elephants need us! Thank you

Kate Shannon

Self, Customer Service Associate at University of Texas Press

Austin, TX

Chair Burns and Members of the House Agriculture and Livestock Committee,

I'm writing to urge you to oppose House Bill 1480 as introduced, which would criminalize the possession and use of materials obtained by whistleblowers to expose unlawful and abusive activity, including animal cruelty, public health risks and food and worker safety violations. At the very least, House Bill 1480 should be amended to remove Section 252.002(4), which creates the disturbing criminal offense that would prohibit people from obtaining evidence of cruelty or wrongdoing.

I understand the importance of agriculture in our state and I want our responsible, higher-welfare farmers to thrive. Texas has so many farms to be proud of and show off for their excellent standard of animal care and husbandry. However, "ag-gag" laws like House Bill 1480 harm the reputations of our state's farmers and ranchers and reduce public trust in agriculture, all for the purpose of shielding a few bad actors. If illegal or unethical activity is occurring on farms where our food is produced, I want those abuses to be brought to light and for those producers to be held accountable for their actions.

House Bill 1480 would prevent the accountability so desperately needed in agriculture and instead punish whistleblowers, ultimately harming Texas farmers, animals, workers and consumers. Texan farmers and legislators should be pushing for more transparency in agriculture, not trying to keep people in the dark about what goes on on farms.

Once again, as your constituent and a resident of the great capitol of Texas, I urge you to oppose House Bill 1480 as introduced and amend the bill to remove Section 252.002(4) that would punish whistleblowers who expose cruelties and wrong doing on farms.

Audrey Tamez

self - non-profit

Austin, TX

The "ag-gag" portion of this bill should be removed immediately. This language is not Texan, and it does not serve the interests of Texans. By seeking to cover up animal abuse on farms, the public trust in farming practices only continues to erode. Openness and fair treatment of animals is the only way to a sustainable future for our Texas farmers. Not to mention, this significantly dampens free speech, which is a pillar of our belief system as Texans. I cannot fathom any other crime being committed and someone being restricted from exposing such acts. The bill goes even further by providing for injunctive relief in Section 252.004, a provision that would act as a prior restraint on speech and allow agricultural operations to prevent even members of the press from sharing information of public interest.

This is dangerous legislation and must be stopped. We cannot shield bad actors through such legislation while eroding public trust in our farmers who take their jobs seriously and commit to raising animals appropriately.

Gib Lewis

self and Exotic Wildlife Association

Austin, TX

I, and Exotic Wildlife Association are in support of this bill. Gib Lewis

Annette Mittenthal

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Self/Retired

Frisco, TX

I'm writing today to OPPOSE the ag-gag language in HB 1480. Ag-gag bills accomplish nothing related to protecting property rights or biosecurity in Texas agriculture facilities. These bills are intended to criminalize whistleblowers who are legally present (and often employed by) an agribusiness. Many responsible farmers strongly oppose ag-gag because these measures hurt the reputation of all agriculture. Research shows that learning about ag-gag efforts undermines consumer trust in farmers and animal agriculture in general. I respectfully request that committee vote NO on HB 1480 so long as the bill contains ag-gag language.

Marie Camino, Ms.

Mercy For Animals, Policy Advisor

Austin, TX

Dear Chair Burns, Vice Chair Anderson, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

Mercy For Animals, a nonprofit organization with approximately 2,000 Texas supporters (including the undersigned, an Austin resident) opposes HB 1480 and urges the Committee to amend the bill to remove Sections 252.002 (a)(4)-(5). Mercy For Animals' Transformation project, a program that builds partnerships with Texas farmers, gives us a unique perspective on HB 1480. As written, HB 1480 poses a serious threat to free speech, small farms, local economies, consumers, public health, animal welfare, workers, and taxpayers.

Sections 252.002 (a)(4)-(5) of HB 1480 are vague and have the potential to be interpreted as criminalizing whistleblowing. Under these sections, an employee or visitor who records abuse or unlawful behavior by the property owner could face a retaliatory accusation that they acted with the criminal purpose set forth in Section (a)(4) or of harboring the latent criminal intent set forth in Section (a)(5).

HB 1480 stands to deter whistleblowers from exposing cruel, illegal, or dangerous conditions in CAFOs or meat processing facilities. Numerous investigations have revealed conditions that put the public at risk and threaten the health and safety of workers and allowed governing bodies to enact reforms to protect their citizens. In the absence of government oversight, investigations are imperative for protecting public health and worker safety.

Studies also show that consumers consider workers rights and animal welfare when making food purchases. A lack of transparency, which HB 1480 would create if passed, would make it unnecessarily difficult for consumers to make truly educated decisions about which products they buy. HB 1480 tells consumers that Texas farmers have something to hide.

In addition to shrouding the agriculture industry in unnecessary secrecy, bills that criminalize whistleblowing often face expensive legal challenges. In four other states, laws similar to HB 1480 were deemed unconstitutional on First Amendment grounds. Should this law pass, Texas may have to defend against litigation, effectively wasting valuable taxpayer dollars.

For the reasons outlined above, Mercy For Animals strongly opposes HB 1480 and asks that this Committee amend the bill to remove Sections 252.002 (a)(4)-(5). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marie Camino

Policy Advisor

Mariec@mercyforanimals.org

239.218.874

Connie Vaughan

CETE

Austin, TX

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Elephants are being abused

Darlene Adair

Self

Deer Park, TX

STOP this bill!

Jennifer Forbes-Watkins

HSUS Texas Allies

Bryan, TX

"I'm writing today to OPPOSE the ag-gag language in HB 1480. Ag-gag bills accomplish nothing related to protecting property rights or biosecurity in Texas agriculture facilities. These bills are intended to criminalize whistleblowers who are legally present (and often employed by) an agribusiness. Many responsible farmers strongly oppose ag-gag because these measures hurt the reputation of all agriculture. Research shows that learning about ag-gag efforts undermines consumer trust in farmers and animal agriculture in general. I respectfully request that committee vote NO on HB 1480 so long as the bill contains ag-gag language."

Thank you,

Jennifer

Jan Parham, Mrs

Self , retired teacher

Wylie, TX

Shielding factory farms from people being aware of animal abuse and suffering is not an acceptable practice! Transparency is what we need ! Save animals from suffering and pain and tell the truth about what goes on behind closed doors!!

Rachael Paulson

Hands on The World Global

Bedford, TX

I am hoping to have a voice about bull hooks being used on elephants at the property in Fredericksburg. Bullocks are used in traveling circuses. Please vote to end this abuse.

Laura Vera

Self

Dickinson, TX

HB 1480 / SB 472, specifically Section 252.002(4), is unconstitutional as it undermines our right to free speech and press by criminalizing concerned citizens' ability to act as whistleblowers and investigate and document violations in industrialized agriculture.

This ag-gag legislation exists to prioritize and protect big industries at the expense of weakening transparency and damaging public trust in small farmers and businesses that uphold the law.

HB 1480 / SB 472 strips away an opportunity to protect citizens and to hold big corporations accountable for any actions that violate worker safety, animal welfare, and public health laws for the sake of a bottom line.

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Brian Wheat
self Software Developer
Austin, TX

Ag-gag laws violate first amendment rights to draw attention to the harms of industrial agriculture. Nothing about the way our food is produced should be a secret. The Ag industry should focus on shifting to a sustainable Plant Based Food system instead of seeking to punish those who expose the cruelty currently happening on factory farms.

Lauren Loney
The Humane Society of the United States
Austin, TX

On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and our thousands of members across Texas, I respectfully ask you to oppose HB 1480, or at minimum, to remove Sec. 252.002 (a)(4). This section in particular threatens constitutionally-protected whistleblowing actions and undercover investigations that have proven critical to protecting animals, workers, and food safety.

Ag-gag provisions such as Sec. 252.002 (a)(4) have been roundly criticized by those within and outside of agriculture for sending the message that farmers have something to hide. HSUS hears time and again from responsible farmers that ag-gag casts suspicion over the entire sector, and that agriculture would benefit from more transparency, not less. It's for these reasons that more than 30 ag-gag bills nationwide have been rejected over the past decade by Republican and Democratic lawmakers alike.

But regardless of how one feels about undercover investigations or whistleblowing employees surreptitiously documenting questionable behavior, the fact is that these actions are shielded by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. States that have passed ag-gag bills have squandered hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars, being forced to pay both the state's legal fees and the legal fees of plaintiffs after ag-gag laws were declared unconstitutional attacks on free speech. Idaho was ordered to pay plaintiffs roughly \$250,000 after its law was struck down. Utah settled its case for \$350,000. It's estimated that Utah spent an additional \$300,000 on its defense efforts. Ag-gag laws have also been struck down in Iowa, North Carolina, and Kansas.

Thank you so much.