

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence
s/c: New Offenses and Changed Penalties
For HB 285

Compiled on: Wednesday, April 16, 2025 1:18 AM

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(SUBCOMMITTEE: NEW OFFENSES AND CHANGED PENALTIES)
Hearing Date: April 15, 2025 8:00 AM

Chris Donofrio

Self

The Woodlands, TX

I STRONGLY SUPPORT HB 285.
Please, pass it out of Committee.

Respectfully, Chris J Donofrio

Olga Nelson

Myself, Registered Nurse and horse owner
Cypress, TX

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB 285. As a former horse owner and a registered nurse, I believe that veterinary professionals should be held to the highest standards of competence, knowledge, and professionalism, just as nurses are held accountable by the Texas Board of Nurse Examiners. Veterinarians have a responsibility to avoid harming animals under their care, and any instances of negligence should be thoroughly investigated and appropriately addressed. HB 285 would unfortunately allow substandard veterinary practices to go unchecked, potentially jeopardizing animal welfare and eroding public trust in the veterinary profession. Texas has many excellent veterinarians, and it is crucial to hold those who practice irresponsibly accountable. I urge you to reject HB 285.

deborah keyes

Keyes Ranch/Self

Dripping Spgs, TX

I have owned, managed and cared for horses for 40 years. I have NEVER witnessed nor known of a reason for the abuse directed to a horse as seen in the video presented to the courts recently of "veterinary procedures" given to horses under the excuse of medical necessity as done by Ashlee Watts. I find this person's behavior totally inappropriate and unprofessional as well as unacceptable to any animal and for any reason. She should be punished for her egregious behavior to the total extent of the law! I further believe she should be locked in a mental institution for the safety of any animal she should ever be in contact with. It is obvious to me that she has no filter, feeling or respect for the conditions her behavior has created. She has no conscience. She is inhuman and should be treated as such. Her medical practice becomes a mere experiment for research purposes oblivious to the screams of pain felt by the horses. This is a case of animal cruelty in its highest form and should be dealt with in the highest form.

Dana Irvin

Self/at home animal caretaker

Cypress, TX

I find it hard to believe that this Bill is even up for debate. All living creatures deserve to have the best care available. All animal owners deserve to be able to expect the professionals caring for them, to not intentionally cause them harm. I cannot fathom dedicating one's life career choice to caring for any living creature, knowingly cause harm and suffering, and then to not have to face any consequences. I have to believe everyone on this committee has, at some point, had an animal you loved. Imagine if you had the misfortune of encountering a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine who engaged in such cruel and inhumane practices. Imagine if that individual did not face any consequences due to this Bill 285. Truly horrific what the animals went through, specifically, at A&M at the hands of Dr. Watts. I am sure these things happen more than we know about. Please consider using compassion in your judgement of this Bill 285. If there are no consequences to this vile behavior, how can any of us have any expectations of superb veterinary care our animals deserve. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Allison Seymour

Self

Austin, TX

I support this bill

Judy Santerre

Self, retired

Wimberley, TX

Veterinarians are rarely charged with animal cruelty. One exception is former Texas A&M Veterinarian Professor Ashlee Watts. Watts tortured a horse to death with a cattle prod at Texas A&M in front of veterinary students. The TVMA language in this bill could make a veterinarian torturing an animal with a cattle prod legal. It could make all animal cruelty by veterinarians and their assistants legal. It could also shield from criminal charges any grooming or boarding personnel working in veterinary clinics which defeats the purpose of this bill as stated by Representative Ordaz.

TVMA's Trent Hightower told this committee in the last session that veterinarians are already being disciplined by the TBVME but more than 90% of complaints from victims of veterinary malpractice are told there was no violation when their veterinarian killed or maimed their beloved pet. The TBVME is a market participant-controlled state oversight agency that protects veterinarians from accountability. It is the job of law enforcement to file criminal charges against persons committing animal cruelty, not the TBVME. This bill removes the ability of law enforcement to do that job.

Any discipline by the TBVME for veterinarians harming companion animals is extremely rare. If animal cruelty is charged by law enforcement and the public is aware of those charges, discipline is almost guaranteed.

Veterinarians already enjoy the most protections of any licensed profession thanks to a powerful lobby. Harmed consumers have no recourse. As animal law attorney Randy Turner stated, "There's really no legal incentive for [a veterinarian] to be careful." There is an extreme lack of accountability.

There is nothing in HB 285 to distinguish veterinary care and animal cruelty. It takes law enforcement and our courts to make that distinction. Leaving veterinarian discipline for animal cruelty up to the TVMA controlled TBVME means denying protection, justice, and fair compensation to 20 million Texans in order to protect from criminal charges the very worst of veterinarians and veterinary staff.

Veterinarians need to know that their worst actions could put them in jail. Veterinarians and their staff should be and need to be subject to our criminal laws.

Please allow law enforcement to do its job and vote no.

Michele Mughannam

Self, marketing manager

Austin, TX

I support this act. Punish these people to the fullest extent of the law.

Robyn Heid

Self

Austin, TX

Please approve this bill. These animals are God's creatures. They are helpless and voiceless, and do not deserve to be treated this way. We must be their voice and do all we can to protect them. Increasing the penalty will help. Please. Thank you.

Ruth Nobile

Self

Austin, TX

I am for this bill to increase the criminal penalties of dog fighting. It is a heinous act to force helpless animals to fight each other, as well as think it's okay to hurt these helpless animals. From my time in rescue, I've been amazed to see how resilient the animals are that come out of these awful situations. They just want to love and be loved. Humans are the ones who instill this disgusting behavior and the dogs are only trying to survive the humans torment. I also believe in this bill not only to protect the animals, but to protect our society. I've seen many people who have disregard for living creatures also have disregard for human life and cause harm to those around them. Increasing the penalties can help our dogs and the public stay safe. Thank you.

Marie Day

Self

Shiner, TX

We already have statutes that address destruction of personal property, and non-livestock animals are considered personal property. This is sloppy legislature at best. I do not support this bill.

Alisha Taylor

self

Meridian, TX

Dear Members of the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to House Bill 285. While I fully support efforts to prevent and punish genuine acts of cruelty against animals, this bill introduces a deeply concerning change to current law: the carve-out exemption for veterinarians and their staff when negligence occurs during the course of their duties.

I unfortunately know how devastating it is when a professional veterinarian is entrusted with that care, causes harm. One of my own animals was seriously harmed due to negligence at Texas A&M University's veterinary teaching hospital and ultimately succumbed to his injuries; it is currently an ongoing investigation. It was preventable, careless, and left us with a life sentence of betrayal and heartbreak. Under HB 285, a veterinarian responsible would be shielded by an "affirmative defense" simply because of their professional status. That is 100% unacceptable.

Legal protection should not be automatic or unequal, especially when negligence leads to pain, injury, or death. Absolutely no one should be above accountability. This exemption weakens the bill's credibility and sends the message that professional title matters more than outcome.

HB 285 fails to strike the right balance. It creates more fear than protection. It grants immunity to professionals and weakens public safety. I urge you to vote no on HB 285 and work toward more balanced legislation that holds all caretakers, professional or not equally and fairly accountable.

Thank you for your time and service to our state.

Alisha Taylor

Mark Taylor
self - engineer
Meridian, TX

Dear Members of the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence,
I strongly oppose HB 285. This bill unjustly exempts veterinarians from accountability for negligence, which is ethically wrong.

We tragically lost a pet due to preventable negligence at Texas A&M University's veterinary teaching hospital. HB 285 would shield professionals simply because of their status, undermining fairness and responsibility. No one (especially professionals) should be above accountability. This puts the public and animal welfare at risk. Please vote NO to HB 285.

Thank you for your time and service -

Mark Taylor

Rhonda Lorkowski
Self
Eules, TX

I support stronger laws and punishments for those convict inflicting pain on innocent creatures. Cruelty inflicted upon innocent animals because they are helpless signifies a person's willingness to seek weak and helpless victims, this could include the elderly and children. Society needs protection from those who enjoy inflicting suffering on weaker creatures.

John Bolgiano
Self - Retired
Llano, TX

Support
I have been a volunteer with a local dog rescue for about five years. I won't subject you to a Sarah McLachlan commercial featuring abused animals. Lets just say I have seen enough over the years to know how important adding "with criminal negligence" to Section 42.092, Penal Code is and what a big difference these three words will make in stopping animal cruelty. Please return a favorable report on HB 285.

Frances Haby
Self
Austin, TX

I support this. The penalty for cruelty to animals must be significant.

Sheila Wiora
Self
Pflugerville, TX

I support this bill.

Yvonne Greene
Self
Fort Worth, TX

Please, please, please, prosecute all who show cruelty toward animals of all kinds.

Sara Leighton Ameringer, Dr

Self Veterinarian

Cypress, TX

As a veterinarian in private practice in Texas, I believe that state employed veterinarians should have to follow the same high standards of care as private practitioners and be held responsible if they do not. There should be no special privileges or protections for state employed veterinarians that are not afforded to private practice veterinarians.

Emily Holden

Self

Austin, TX

PLEASE PASS THIS, the animal abuse and lack of consequences is outrageous

Jodi Ware, Dr.

Self

Kingwood, TX

HB 285 was paved with good intentions, that is until the Texas Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA), in lobbying to protect its ~5K members, intervened last Session.

The TVMA pushed for the addition of the (d-1) clause, which would give veterinary professionals license to be criminally negligent without fear of prosecution.

The TVMA's stated rationale was that the Texas Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners (TBVME) regulates veterinarians; however, the TBVME 1) lacks criminal jurisdiction, and 2) has been doing a dismal job of administratively regulating, as evidenced by nearly a decade of unprecedented serially failed Sunset Advisory Commission reviews.

As I have already communicated to Rep. Ordaz, I cannot understand how or why veterinary professionals would have a special exception in this bill. Rebecca Allensworth, Distinguished Chair and Associate Dean at Vanderbilt University Law School, recently said, "Criminal law has stepped in to the regulatory void left by lax professional discipline."

We (~30M+) Texans are counting on you to protect the public and our pets. You must strike (d-1) before passing this bill. Too many lives—animal and human—are at stake.