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Anti-gassing bill has local support

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Who would believe it is legal in the state of Illinois to euthanize pets in a gas chambers?

Well, it is. But thanks to State Representative John Fritchey (D-Chicago), that may soon end.

In February, Fritchey introduced a bill to the Illinois State Legislature to end the use of carbon monoxide euthanasia for animals.

The gas chamber has been used for executing prisoners in the United States in the past.

In the early 1990s, the question of cruel and unusual punishment ended the use of the gas chambers for execution.

But despite the knowledge that the process is cruel and unusual, many states continue to euthanize unwanted pets in gas chambers.

With 6 to 8 million cats and dogs entering shelters across the country, an overpopulation problem haunts the United States.

Sadly, 3 to 4 million of those pets are euthanized each year.

A majority are euthanized via an injection which is painless and quick.

But still many enter the gas chamber and experience a lengthy and painful death.

Many question the need for this method when an injection is not only more humane, but more economical.

The Chicago English Bulldog Rescue Group (CEBR) has gotten the state of Illinois to recognize this issue.

CEBR has joined forces with Fritchey to introduce House Bill 4844, a law to eliminate the use of carbon monoxide euthanasia for companion animals.

Rescue groups across the state have united to support this bill.

Hope Animal Rescues in Edwardsville is on the list.

Co-found of the group Jackie Spiker said her rescue has been lobbying for something to be done for several years now.

"We have been trying to get a bill written for two years to ban the use of gas chambers. When we heard that finally Rep. Fritchey had one drawn up we could not wait to be a part of it and offer our support," Spiker said.

Hope Animal Rescues is one of many groups dedicated to saving animals from shelters who euthanize animals in a gas chamber, such as the animal shelter in Mount Vernon.

Attorney for CEBR Jordan Matyas said there is no way to know how many shelters, breeders or other groups in the state of Illinois use this method to kill unwanted animals or how they do it. Matyas said in some cases animals are still euthanized in inadequate gas chambers.

In fact, while reviewing the problem, Matyas discovered one shelter who gasses hundreds of pets each month that did not have a license to do so.

In addition, he discovered a shelter in southern Illinois which gassed numerous pets both cats and dogs at the same time which is in violation of the current law.

Hope Animal Rescues has experienced the gas chamber first-hand.

Spiker said killing unwanted pets in a gas chamber is inhumane.

"The pets suffer, they scream and they try to get out to get some air. Once you hear those screams, you never forget them - never. There have been incidents where it has taken nearly 45 minutes for the pets to die. Forty-five minutes of suffering is uncivilized. People who commit unspeakable crimes are spared this type of death because it has been deemed in humane, so why do we still use it on homeless

animals?"

Spiker said she has witnessed animals euthanized in a gas chamber.

"The places we visit to rescue are sad, dark and very disturbing. Nearly every dog we take has been in there while that chamber was turned on, and believe me every dog in there has heard the screams and knows what they mean. No creature forgets the sound of death. When we open the door to help them most cower because I think they believe that we are there to drag them down that hall," she said.

Spiker added there is no need for animals to die this way when there are humane options.

"It causes a lot of stress on us as animal lovers. The ones we don't have room for will die that way, and unless this bill passes there isn't anything we can do about it. There was one time when we had some extra money and actually paid a vet to perform the lethal injection, because we just couldn't bare to know how they would die. Because of the pet overpopulation there is no way to save all of them, but at least we can offer them a peaceful end to their life instead of a barbaric murder."

Fritchey said, "In a perfect world, the need to euthanize animals wouldn't exist."

"But in those cases where it is going to be done, any sense of decency should tell us that this is simply not the method to use."

The bill was assigned to the Agriculture and Conservation Committee on Friday.

Matyas said gassing is still legal in eight states including Illinois. The other states are: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania.

He said it takes 30 to 40 minutes for the pets to die.

"They should not have to suffer when put to sleep," Matyas said.

He said CEBR has not only introduced the bill for the animals but also for the safety of those who operate the gas chambers.

To learn more about Hope Animal Rescues, visit www.hoperescues.com.

For more information about CEBR, House Bill 4844 and how to help, go to www.ebullymatch.com.

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