

Testimony of Corporal David R. Hunt
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Before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
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My name is Cpl. David R. Hunt and I'm a deputy with the Franklin County Sheriff's Office in Columbus, Ohio. I am in my 25th year with the Sheriff's Office, the past 14 years assigned to the Special Investigations Unit conducting vice and narcotics investigations. I have been investigating illegal dog fighting since February 2002.

I am here today to speak in support of H.R. 817, the "Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act of 2005." Having worked illegal animal fighting investigations for the past four years, I continually see the need to make this activity a felony offense at the federal level. Dog fighters often travel across state lines to engage in large-scale fights where the purses are in the tens of thousands of dollars. Other peripheral criminal activity such as drug trafficking, gambling, and illegal firearms possession is typically associated with dog fighting.

In January 2003, my agency executed a search warrant on such an event in progress arresting forty individuals. Three fights were scheduled for that evening with people attending from New York, Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Alabama. Two of the dogs slated to fight that night were from Buffalo, New York with another dog coming from Richmond, Virginia. Over \$30,000.00 in cash was seized as each fight had a \$10,000.00 purse. Additional cash from gambling, drugs, and a .50 caliber handgun were also confiscated.

In July 2003, a patrol deputy with my agency stopped a vehicle from South Carolina that was found to be transporting nine (9) scarred pit bull dogs. Subsequent investigation revealed that this subject was a "canine courier" service utilized by dog fighters for transporting fighting dogs for sale, trade, or breeding. One of the dogs was destined to a convicted dog fighter in Columbus. Interview of the driver revealed that he had picked up, and dropped off, fighting dogs in Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Missouri, and Illinois prior to being stopped in Ohio. Under Ohio's statutes, no criminal charges could be filed.

In October 2003, a dog fighter from Williamson, West Virginia brought a pit bull to Columbus to deliver to a confidential informant working for me. This meeting, which was audio and video taped, documented the fighter talking about fighting dogs, breeding dogs for fighting, past dogfights, and even inviting the CI to attend a match in West Virginia.

This case was presented to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General who agreed to adopt it for federal prosecution. Upon meeting with an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, the USDA Special Agent and myself were advised that the U.S. Attorney's Office would not accept this case, as it was a federal misdemeanor. We were further advised that the only federal misdemeanor that would be prosecuted in the Southern District of Ohio was Interference with a Flight Crew.

The investigation was then referred to the Franklin County Prosecutor's Office who agreed to prosecute the West Virginia dog fighter. This subject eventually pled guilty to state charges and cooperated on other dog fighting investigations.

Many underground fighting publications chronicle fights that occur across the United States that are typically attended by fighters from other states. Many dog fighters in central Ohio routinely travel to Louisiana to purchase desired fighting dog bloodlines. I currently have investigations that reach into the states that border Ohio and have to rely on the appropriate local law enforcement agency for assistance. Most law enforcement officers are unaware, or uneducated, on dog fighting thus many of these investigations fail to come to fruition.

My office has an excellent relationship with the USDA Office of Inspector General as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Making this law a federal felony will significantly assist local law enforcement. Teaming up with federal law enforcement will aid in the pursuit of those individuals who routinely cross state lines to engage in this vicious illegal activity.