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Testimony By: Casey Pheiffer

Presented To: Senate Committee on Environment and Agriculture

In Support of: S.B. 109

Date: May 13, 2009

Good afternoon Chairwoman Sosnowski and members of the Environment and Agriculture Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 109. My name is Casey Pheiffer and I am representing The Humane Society of the United States - the nation's largest animal protection organization. We have 11 million members and constituents nationwide, including more than 48,422 residents in Rhode Island.

If passed, this legislation would allow Rhode Island to join every other New England state in prohibiting mourning dove shooting.

These backyard songbirds have significant economic value to the state. They are the second most-frequently reported bird at birdfeeders and are consequently a large part of the growing multi-million dollar bird watching industry in Rhode Island. In fact, when comparing individuals who shoot doves to those who enjoy them as songbirds, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, wildlife watchers outnumber hunters 22 to 1. This is the third largest gap of any state in the country and if the decades-old decline of hunting continues, this discrepancy will only grow.

However, even top hunting states reject mourning dove shooting. In November 2006, 69 percent of Michigan voters rejected a proposal to allow mourning dove shooting. A majority of voters in all 83 counties voted to protect these birds.

Celebrating Animals, Confronting Cruelty

Quite simply, shooting doves is unnecessary and serves no wildlife management purpose. Mourning doves are ground-feeding birds that eat pest weed seeds; they pose no threat to crops and are nicknamed the “farmer’s friend.” There are no management problems in the other New England states that prohibit dove shooting and no one has suggested in those states that doves are overpopulated.

Doves are usually shot for target practice and not food. In fact, during the shooting season, doves are actually at their lightest body weight for the entire year. And when shot, studies have found that 30 percent of the animals are wounded, rather than killed outright. These wounded animals are rarely retrieved.

Additionally, shooting doves produces mistaken identity kills, including killing protected species like American kestrels, Sharp-skinned hawks and several other federally-protected species.

Finally, dove shooting contributes to the discharge of enormous amounts of toxic lead shot in the environment. For every dove shot and retrieved, shooters discharge an average of eight shots according to a long-term study conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey and Fish and Wildlife Service. The toxicity of lead and its lethal risk to ground-feeding animals, birds of prey, and even people is widely documented.

In conclusion, there’s no good reason to shoot a dove and I urge you to support Senate Bill 109 to protect mourning doves. Thank you.