



[Promote Cruelty-Free Research]

ABOUT THE HSUS

The HSUS is the nation's largest and most powerful animal protection organization, backed by 10.5 million Americans, or one in every 30. Established in 1954, The HSUS seeks a humane and sustainable world for all animals, including people. We are America's mainstream force against cruelty, exploitation, and neglect and also the nation's most trusted voice extolling the human-animal bond.



Student Choice

IN YOUR STATE

Celebrating Animals | Confronting Cruelty



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

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A Lobbying Guide



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WHAT IS A STUDENT CHOICE LAW?

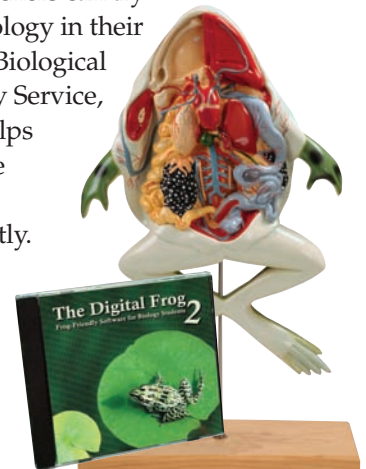
Student choice laws allow students who object to classroom methods that involve the harming or killing of animals access to humane instructional resources without penalty.

WHY CREATE A STUDENT CHOICE LAW IN YOUR STATE?

Student choice allows all students—regardless of ethical or religious beliefs—access to a high-quality biology education.

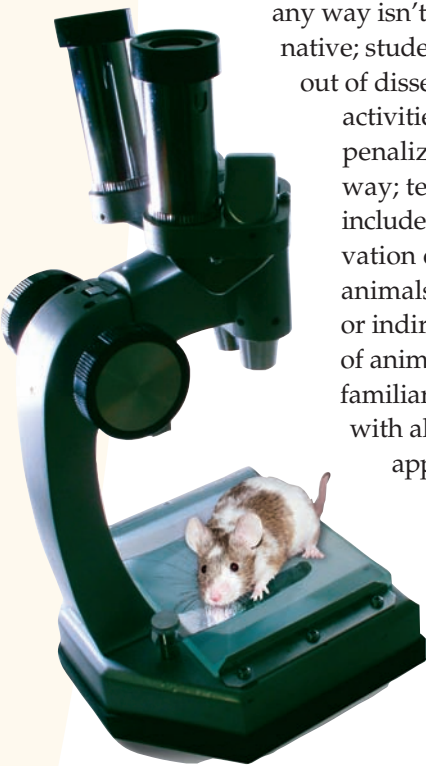
- **Many students have genuine objections to dissection and live animal exercises.** Students' objections are often motivated by a deeply held belief in the value of life or by concern over inhumane animal capture and collection methods, treatment, and killing practices. Many of the millions of vertebrate animals killed each year for dissection in U.S. schools suffer prior to death.
- **Student choice protects freedom of ethical and religious belief.** In many cases throughout the United States, students have had to resort to legal action to ensure a biology education that doesn't compromise their ethical or religious beliefs. Freedom of ethical and religious belief has been supported by law in each of these cases, sometimes with substantial monetary awards. Student choice policies prevent such adversarial situations.

- **Students who choose alternatives receive an equivalent education.** More than 20 published scientific research studies show that students who use alternatives learn anatomy and physiology *as well as or better than* students who use animals. The quality of interactive biology education resources has increased enormously in recent years.
- **Alternatives save money for schools.** Cost comparisons show that humane resources cost less. Unlike the dissection of dead animals, alternative materials are durable and reusable and can save schools thousands of dollars each year.
- **Science teachers support student choice.** A survey of participants at the twentieth annual National Science Teachers Association convention revealed that the majority of high school teachers support student choice in dissection. Another survey of U.S. biology teachers found that 66 percent of respondents support student choice.
- **Alternatives are widely available.** The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) Humane Education Loan Program (HELP) offers the free loan of biology teaching resources—including CD-ROMs, videotapes, and models—so teachers can try out the latest technology in their lessons. The HSUS Biological Science Consultancy Service, run by scientists, helps teachers identify the resources they need quickly and efficiently. Other animal protection organizations offer similar programs.



WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO CREATING A STUDENT CHOICE LAW?

- **Know and gather your facts.** In addition to knowing why student choice laws are important, you should be familiar with those enacted in other states. Visit our website at humanesociety.org/dissection_laws for a list of current state laws.
- **Know what should be included in the bill language.** The bill language should include the following components: students have the opportunity to opt out of dissection, vivisection, or other activities that may be harmful to animals; students will be offered an alternative exercise of equivalent difficulty; observation of or participation in dissection or use of an animal in any way isn't an acceptable alternative; students who opt out of dissection or other activities won't be penalized in any way; test exercises won't include dissection, observation of dissected animals, or other direct or indirect harmful use of animals; teachers will familiarize themselves with alternative resources appropriate to their courses of instruction; and teachers will inform students at least one month in advance that



THE STATE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

MOST STATE GOVERNMENTS have a bicameral system, consisting of both a House of Representatives (or Delegates) and a Senate, similar to the federal government. However, one state (Nebraska) and two U.S. territories (Guam and the Virgin Islands) have a unicameral system consisting of only one governing body—each legislative district is represented by a single legislator called a senator. But in most states, each legislative district is represented by one senator and one, two, or three representatives.

Don't confuse your federal elected officials with your state elected officials. Remember that federal legislators deal only with federal bills, and state legislators deal only with state bills.

Most state legislatures aren't in session year-round, and some aren't even in session every year. Most legislators have offices in their state capitals. Call their state capital offices first, even when the state legislature is out of session. There usually will be a recording of where you can reach your legislator when he or she isn't at the state capital.

You can find out who your state legislators are by calling your local board of elections or the League of Women Voters or by visiting humanesociety.org/leglookup.

they have the opportunity to perform an alternative assignment should they choose not to dissect.

- **Make and maintain contact with The HSUS.** Contact our Animal Research Issues staff at 202-452-1100 or ari@humanesociety.org or our Government Affairs staff at 202-452-1100 or legislation@humanesociety.org.
- **Find a sponsor.** The legislator who sponsors the bill is key to its success. Research which legislators you should first contact. Include your own elected officials in the search since a direct connection with a legislator helps—but examine your legislators’ history on this issue first. You can find information on potential sponsors from your state’s legislative information office. If your state doesn’t have such an office, you can get information from the legislature’s leadership or the Clerk of the House, the Secretary of State’s office, the governor, or the public library.

When evaluating potential sponsors, consider the following: Does the legislator have a history of supporting animal welfare issues? (Look at who has introduced animal welfare bills in the past.) Does the legislator have a history of being able to get bills through the legislature—not just introduced? Is the legislator on the committee most likely to deal with dissection in education? Is the legislator respected, or will you automatically lose a significant number of votes because the legislator supports your bill? Are the legislator’s constituents likely to support a student choice bill?

And is the legislator likely to get reelected? Establish positive relationships with legislators’ staff members, and *don’t underestimate their importance*. They’re often legislators’ most influential and trusted advisors and are usually more accessible than legislators. Staff members can also provide information about the district and how to organize effective grassroots help.

- **Meet with potential sponsors.** Before meeting with a potential sponsor, determine the specific points you want to make and what you want the legislator to do. Start the meeting by speaking of some current legislative matter, describe past successes on your issues, or comment on something the legislator is working on. If you have a connection with the district—i.e., you live there, went to school there, or represent specific groups from there—say so.

Know the facts about your issue when you meet with legislators and be prepared to answer questions. It’s impossible to know everything, and you may be asked unexpected questions. If you don’t know the answers, don’t provide incorrect information. It’s important that you gain the legislators’ trust. Let them know that you will get the information, and send it in a follow-up letter. Most legislators are dealing with *many* bills, so don’t overload them with books, articles, or studies. Instead, point them to various resources, provide concise fact sheets and summaries, and offer to assist whenever needed. If you want to meet with a key legislator not from your area, enlist a constituent to initiate contact and to arrange for the two of you to meet the legislator. Having the support of a legislator’s constituent—especially a parent or student—

will make a positive impact. The constituent should do most of the talking at this meeting and should be briefed on the issues. You're there to provide facts and to support the constituent.

■ **Know what needs to be in the bill.**

Since you're asking the legislator to introduce a bill, be prepared to state specifically what needs to be included in the bill language or to submit a draft of the bill that you've already prepared using the directions on pages 4 and 6. If the legislator is interested in sponsoring the bill, legislative counsel or the bill drafting office can get the bill into the correct format.

■ **Express gratitude.** It's important that you write a thank you letter to the legislator for meeting with you. In the letter, restate what the meeting produced, such as "we are thrilled that you have agreed to sponsor the bill to allow student choice in dissection."

■ **Initiate and maintain contact.**

Personal contact with a legislator demonstrates that you're a good resource for information. The legislator will be grateful for your assistance, which in turn might be reflected in future votes. After a legislator has agreed to sponsor your bill, make sure you know what role he or she expects you to play from that point forward. Be prepared to tell the legislator what support you can provide, who else supports the bill,

problems that could arise, and your initial analysis of the vote count in the legislature, if possible. Never misrepresent yourself or your position.

■ **Support the sponsor.** Discuss the strategy for getting the bill passed. The sponsor may want you to lobby for cosponsors in addition to building public support for the bill. The legislator may be able to pick up a few cosponsors by speaking with colleagues but will probably want you to do the legwork needed to get a broad range of supporters. Make sure the sponsor pushes for hearings so the bill gets off first base. Many bills are introduced but never "move." If you can get the chair of the committee with jurisdiction over the bill or the leader of the particular chamber to introduce the bill, it will have an excellent head start. However, if the sponsor isn't committed to getting the bill through the legislative process, your only accomplishment is that of giving the issue greater credibility and respect.

■ **Discuss the timing of events.** You should also discuss timing and strategy with the bill's sponsor. Which chamber— House or Senate— should begin work on the bill (i.e., which chamber is more likely to pass it)? When should the bill be introduced? When should hearings be held? Is there an upcoming event that ties in with the subject that could help get media attention? Is there a particularly good time for a vote to occur? These are questions the sponsor can help answer, but keep in mind that you may not have the luxury of choosing your timing or following a set strategy. You'll often have very little notice before a hearing or floor vote. Or the bill might proceed smoothly for a while

only to stall later for no apparent reason. If and when it moves again, don't bother with timing—just push.

HOW CAN YOU GATHER SUPPORT FOR THE BILL?

- **Have people write to the sponsor and their state legislators to show their support.** If the bill is introduced, ask friends to write to their legislators to encourage them to vote in favor of the bill. Find students or teachers who will be affected by the law who will voice their support. Contact The HSUS or any other local or national groups that support the bill and request that they send alerts to their members.
- **Be prepared to testify or arrange for an expert to testify.** Monitor the bill closely. There's often little warning that activity on a bill is about to occur. The proponents may be plugged into activities surrounding it, but more than likely no one is going to alert you. The bill's sponsor is often the best source for information on scheduled hearings and upcoming votes. Hearings are a great opportunity to show the committee members that there's a strong factual basis for your position, that you represent a broad-based constituency, and that your bill solves a problem. When influential witnesses present good testimony, you're more likely to receive positive press coverage and motivate public support.

- **Get as many people as possible to attend the hearing.** Make sure attendees have something that visibly demonstrates their support of the bill (e.g., stickers or pins). Some items to consider when assessing a hearing's success include: Did a large number of supporters show up for the hearing, or were only opponents present? Did the testifiers threaten and abuse the legislators, or did they make rational and lucid points? Did supporters of the bill effectively refute opponents' allegations?
- **Decide who should testify.** Who is at ease speaking in front of a large group? Those who testify on behalf of an organization or government entity are often viewed as experts and are expected to be better-than-average public speakers. Are there specific people or groups that antagonize the legislators? Are there individuals who live in the committee members' districts who could testify? Which witnesses can best overcome the opposition's arguments? Which supporters can answer committee questions and think on their feet? While professional testimony is important, many states allow citizens to testify, and such testimony can be very influential. In fact, students can be the *most* influential testifiers for student choice bills. Members recognize the time it takes to travel to the capitol and the fear that many people experience when standing up to state their opinions. When presenting testimony, it's important to listen to any rules that the committee chairperson gives before the hearing. In addition, please consider the following:
 - **Prepare.** Usually there's a time limit for giving testimony, such as three minutes. Prepare and jot down two or three key points that can be made within that limit. If you

hand in written testimony, those points can be expanded on. Practice your testimony beforehand.

- **Dress appropriately.** Wear what you would normally wear to a religious service or a business meeting, such as a suit. A good impression can only help your message.
- **Arrive early.** If you don't wish to wait, show up a half hour early to complete and turn in a sign-up card, which is often required of speakers.
- **Listen to other testimony.** Don't repeat verbatim what a previous speaker has said, although you can offer support for a previously stated point or position.
- **Identify yourself.** Begin by giving your name and, usually, your full address. If you're testifying for a special interest group, give the name of the organization, briefly describe the group's mission, and state how many members it has.
- **State your position.** Give a clear and concise description of your position on the issue or the bill.
- **Personalize your testimony.** Use your own words to describe how the issue affects you without being melodramatic. Don't read from a script. Remember that formulated testimony isn't as eloquent as your own words.
- **Focus your message.** Speak on the merits of the bill and the issue itself, not personal feelings you may have about the bill's opponents, for example. It's important to remain respectful and professional.

- **Offer solutions.** Whether stating a specific or general approach to an issue, solutions or feasible alternatives are always well received. If you want amendments or revisions to legislation, provide your edited version of the bill in writing before the start of the hearing.
- **Request action and thank the committee.** State exactly what you would like the committee or sponsor to do, such as: "Please vote yes on [bill number] and help students who would like to use effective alternatives to dissection." Close your presentation by thanking the committee for taking the time to listen to your viewpoint.
- **Offer to answer any questions.** Usually it's acceptable for legislators to interrupt presenters to ask questions. If you don't know the answer, say so and, if possible, defer the question to another witness who has the information. Most states also accept written testimony—be sure to comply with the submission schedule. Often legislators will read the testimony while people are testifying, and sometimes it's used by committee and personal staff or the media.

- **Work with legislators to prepare questions they can pose to bill opponents.** In hearings, opponents often make erroneous statements only to have them go unchallenged by committee members due to a lack of knowledge. If possible, slip notes to legislators pointing out inconsistencies or errors in testimony.

By getting involved in your state's legislative process, you can help ensure that no student will be forced to choose between participating in animal suffering and having access to a quality biology education.