



May 17, 2023

Goldie Ghamari
Chair, Standing Committee on Justice Policy
Whitney Block, Room 1405
99 Wellesley Street W
Toronto, ON

Sent via on-line submission.

Re: Ontario Sheep Farmers Comments Regarding Bill 102

Dear Chair & Members of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy:

Ontario Sheep Farmers (OSF) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback and comments on Bill 102, *Strengthening Safety and Modernizing Justice Act, 2023*. We also appreciated participating in the recent roundtable held on May 2nd, 2023, facilitated by Parliamentary Assistant Christine Hogarth and our past involvement along with many other Ontario livestock commodities in the process leading up to the creation of the Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act.

The roundtable on the proposed changes in Bill 102 provided a limited opportunity to share our views. Ontario's farm groups are requesting a consultation on the PAWS Act as a whole with the broader agricultural sector to foster an engaged and unified approach to livestock care.

OSF is a producer-run organization established in 1985 that represents the province's 3,000 sheep farmers who contribute over \$530 million to Ontario's economy. Ontario is home to the country's largest sheep flock and processes over 50% of the sheep and lambs born in Canada. We believe passionately that sheep farming is an agricultural business sector that contributes to the well-being of our communities and our province and offers unique opportunities to develop new markets, provide needed environmental benefits and grow both our domestic and international markets.

OSF is committed to high standards of animal care by ensuring Ontario sheep farmers are aware and uphold the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) Sheep Codes of Practice. The NFACC Sheep codes have been developed based on science, animal husbandry and best practices and are a tool used to guide producers on best husbandry practices.

Please find OSF's general comments at this time listed below.

- Reporting and transparency – When the PAWS Act first came into force in 2020 there was a commitment by the government for increased reporting on items such as the number of cases involving livestock. OSF believes that there is a need for more detailed information on the number



[OntarioSheep.org](https://ontariosheep.org)

130 Malcolm Road, Guelph, Ontario N1K 1B1 T 519.836.0043 E admin@ontariosheep.org

of calls related to agriculture, number of species-specific cases, high level details on how many calls were frivolous calls, the total number of confiscations, animal welfare charges etc. We ask that this information be provided to respective commodity groups on a regular and ongoing basis.

- Mental health & producer wellness - OSF has been involved in several investigations where a producer was in distress due to failing mental health or a personal crisis. We noticed in these situations that the current enforcement model focuses on the animal and not the human working with the animals. OSF believes that there needs to be increased training and resources for Animal Welfare Services (AWS) to better identify signs of mental distress and make connections to mental health services when needed.
- On Farm Biosecurity - OSF is concerned about on farm biosecurity enforcement especially with inspectors traveling from farm to farm and the potential for increased spreading of disease. OSF asks for on farm biosecurity compliance be a priority for inspectors entering a farm premises including pastures.
- Definition of distress - The Act states that an animal can be removed if it is in “critical distress.” OSF asks for further information on how “critical stress” is decided and what training is used for inspectors to determine the level of distress being experienced by the animal. There is general concern with the knowledge of inspectors when it comes to farm animals and whether they have a definition of distress that comes from a knowledgeable vet or farmer. OSF suggests that wherever a vet is mentioned in the Act, it should be defined as a vet with specific knowledge through clinical practice with that species.
- Inspector/Commodity Training - OSF asks that the Ministry work with livestock commodity groups and general farm organizations to assist in training program development for inspectors. OSF has an extensive resource library and we are happy to share information that will be helpful to improve inspectors’ knowledge of sheep standards of care, handling procedures and farming practices.
- Enforcement and Inspections – OSF believes that a trained commodity group representative should be present when the animal welfare inspector conducts a farm visit. In the event where the commodity group or representative is not available a small ruminant veterinarian should join the inspector when visiting a farm for an inspection especially when determining if action should be taken such as charges.
- Cost Recovery – OSF understands the need for cost recovery, however, under the current act it is not capped and appears to be highly subjective. The proposed amendments have the potential to lead to uncapped costs for animal owners or custodians by expanding the range of costs able to be recovered by AWS in the event of animal distress. Assuming they are justified, OSF believes that costs included in Statements of Account must be reasonable, consistent and in line with industry standards. The value of a seized “marketable” animal such as a sheep or lamb should be assessed as soon as possible. OSF believes that the statements of account should not exceed the maximum market value of the assessed livestock. This would allow the ability for the farmer to recover costs through the sale of the animal to pay the province.



- Updating Animal Care Review Board - OSF understands the need for advice from the Animal Care Review Board (ACRB) when evaluating statements of account. ACRB assessment of Statements of Account needs to warrant that the costs in the specified situations were reasonable, warranted, justified and transparent.
- Appeal process - OSF believes that under the current Act, the specified five business days (for appeal) is insufficient. Those who may be unfamiliar with the process or current legislation, or that wish to retain legal counsel do not have adequate time. Extending the timeline past 5 business days will allow livestock owners the time to make informed decisions.

In closing we thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. OSF welcomes the opportunity for further discussion on this submission and on additional improvements to the animal welfare system in Ontario.

Sincerely,



John Hemsted

