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May 21, 1989

The Honorable Thomas R. Caltagirone
House Post Office
House of Representatives
Harrisburg, PA. 17120-0028

Dear Mr. Caltagirone:

The purpose of this letter is to express my unequivocal support of House Bill 873 as introduced by Representative Thomas Murphy and House Bill 696, introduced by Representative George Saurman.

As an active science educator with some thirty years' experience on both the secondary and college level I have a valid interest in, and am particularly concerned with promoting the passage of, Section 2, subsection (e) of Representative Murphy's measure. I refer to that portion of House Bill 873 which guarantees the right of students and employees in Pennsylvania to abstain from vivisection or dissection without penalty or recriminations.

In my years of teaching both high-school and college students I have found many - competent, caring and industrious young men and women - who viewed dissection as a non-productive, repugnant and morally unacceptable activity. And I often wonder about how many potentially fine science students we are losing solely because of the arrogant insistence of some instructor that they participate in an activity which was a violation of their personal convictions. It seems almost inconceivable to me that we should expect these students to leave their values and moral convictions hanging, on a peg in the hall-way, when they enter a classroom.

I offer from my own experience testimony in support of Mr. Murphy's bill: I am aware of, and have witnessed, cases in which students, compelled by authority and by circumstance, to dissect passed out in classrooms (in one case of which I am aware with subsequent additional injury,) passed out in hallways and restrooms and were found, shaking and sobbing, in extremes of emotional stress at the door of the laboratory. Such situations - and I testify that they do indeed occur - are hardly compatible with our professed philosophy as teachers and administrators that we provide a positive, pleasant and rewarding atmosphere in which youngsters can learn and enjoy learning.

As Mr. Bernard Unti, Assistant to the President of the American Anti-Vivisection Society, has written: "Isn't it time to adopt policies that guarantee students with sincere moral objections to dissection and vivisection the opportunity to continue their work in the biological disciplines, and clarify what steps should be taken in the event that instructor and students cannot agree on a satisfactory alternative?"

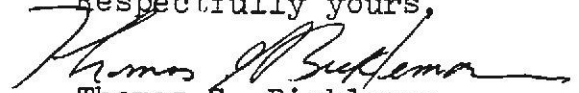
At the very least every science student - particularly in a system which provides for compulsory attendance - should have a moral choice that has the backing of law and statute; every public school should have a clear policy offering non-animal laboratory activities and an approved procedure by means of which a student may appeal for exclusion from laboratory activities that violate their personal convictions.

Such humane legislation, as promoted by Representative Murphy and his colleagues, would in no way have a deleterious effect on current educational programs; it would involve no significant expenditure of funds and would in no way adversely affect the activities of those students who do not object to dissection. It would merely insure that those students who choose not to dissect would have the right to decline to do so - a right which, in fact, may be implicit in the First Amendment of the Constitution.

Finally it is noteworthy that in respected professional journals, including The American Biology Teacher and The Science Teacher, there has been an increasing number of articles by various educators questioning the propriety of compelling boys and girls to undertake dissection without providing alternative activities for those who feel the need for them.

I wish to thank you and the honorable members of the Judiciary Committee for the opportunity you have presented in bringing House Bill 873 and 696 to a hearing and I respectfully urge your support and endorsement of these worthy and humane measures.

Respectfully yours,


Thomas G. Bickleman

(Runner-up, 1989 National Humane Education Teacher of the Year.)