I, Wendy Swift DVM, am a citizen of the state of Michigan, a pet owner, and a veterinarian with over 12 years of animal welfare experience. As a Certified Euthanasia By Injection and Compassion Fatigue Instructor, an associate veterinarian at both a private practice and a nonprofit facility, and a consultant for many animal welfare agencies nationally, I feel I can share pertinent information that will aid you in understanding the issue at hand. Today, June 13, 2013, I would like to voice my opinion on the need for euthanasia by injection (EBI) for companion animals in our state.

Euthanasia by Injection (EBI) is considered the most humane way for any animal to be euthanized regardless if it is a personal pet or a shelter animal. When performed properly by trained personnel, EBI is painless, and begins to take effect within seconds. We need to be a voice for the animals that are homeless and deemed unadoptable in our shelters. They deserve a humane death.

Every national sheltering, veterinary and animal welfare organization including the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the National Animal Control Association, the Humane Society of the United States, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the American Humane Association agrees that the gas chamber does not meet best practices for the industry even when used properly. Improper use of gas chambers (overloading chambers with multiple animals, use for pediatric or geriatric animal euthanasia, etc) and use of poorly functioning or handmade chambers (inappropriate gas concentrations, leaking of gas, etc) occurs daily resulting in pain and suffering for shelter pets. EBI is the "gold standard" when considering humane euthanasia practices. Also the AVMA has published the 2013 Euthanasia Guidelines that outline humane methods of euthanasia for shelters. Recommendations for humane euthanasia of shelter animals were discussed in detail nationally, and the new guidelines have been written to reflect the importance for EBI in all circumstances for companion animals (enclosed).

There are myriad reasons our shelters must stop using the gas chamber and utilize only EBI for the euthanasia of our shelter pets. The gas chamber is inhumane, taking up to an agonizing 25 minutes to end an animal's life. Carbon monoxide is extremely hazardous to humans, and shelter workers have been injured and even killed by malfunctioning chambers. Studies have shown that EBI costs less than using a gas chamber-an extremely important consideration in these tough economic times. Animals that are old, sick, or very young cannot be effectively euthanized in a gas chamber because of physiological complications. Euthanasia technicians and shelter staff members report less emotional stress and compassion fatigue when using EBI compared to gas chamber use. Public perception of gas chamber use has detrimental effects on the shelter especially when adoption rates and donations are concerned. Simply put, there are no valid reasons for continuing to use the gas chamber.

A very limited number of shelters in Michigan still use the outdated and inhumane method of gassing animals. Despite having the tools available to provide EBI, these shelters have a variety of reasons why not to transition including cost, less stress on animals and staff, staffing constraints, and inability to obtain euthanasia drugs (licensed shelters that employ EBI certified technicians can purchase controlled drugs under satellite registration, through their animal shelter staff veterinarian, or by using a direct registration through the Drug Enforcement Administration). All of which have been proven not to be valid reasons to continue gassing shelter pets. An EBI training grant is currently available that would provide shelter staff with an opportunity to provide EBI certification through a 2 day class taught for minimal cost.

Michigan Citizens love our pets, and we want our shelters to be safe and compassionate havens for those animals who are lost and homeless. Fortunately, SB 423 and SB 424 will do just that by ensuring that only EBI will be used in Michigan shelters and by USDA-licensed dealers who broker pets for resale. I ask that you act swiftly to ensure the passage of these Bills in an attempt to better the quality of care for the dogs and cats in Michigan as every shelter pet deserves a humane death. Nineteen states have now passed laws prohibiting the gassing of shelter animals, and it's definitely time for our state to join them. Shelter pets deserve better. Please be their voice and vote "yes" for SB 423 and SB 424.

Wendy Swift DVM
Citizen of Ottawa County, MI
affinity4nature@gmail.com