

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### PORTAGE ANIMAL PROTECTIVE LEAGUE HUMANE AGENT FILES CHARGES RELATED TO 146 DECEASED DOGS FOUND IN MANTUA

**Ravenna, Ohio** (June 27, 2023)—In response inquiries from the media, the Portage Animal Protective League (Portage APL) is able to release the following information.

On Friday, June 16, 2023, the Portage APL's Humane Investigations Department executed a search warrant at a Mantua home after receiving a tip that an animal cruelty charge was pending in Parma, Ohio against Barbara Wible, the homeowner and President of Canine Lifeline, Inc., a nonprofit animal rescue.

The Portage APL's Humane Investigations Department previously initiated an investigation at this property in July 2022 after receiving a tip about dogs being kept in a van. The Humane Agent responded to the property and found a van containing numerous dogs. The Agent spoke with Wible, who explained that the dogs were Canine Lifeline, Inc. dogs that were "pulled from Kentucky." Wible further explained that she has cancer and would no longer be operating the rescue by October 2022. Wible freely supplied the veterinary and other records for the dogs. The dogs appeared healthy and up to date on all medical care.

Wible would not allow the Agent inside the home, explaining that there were only four dogs inside and that her mother had resided in the home. The Agent could see the four dogs in the upstairs window of the home and they too appeared healthy. The Agent instructed Wible that the dogs in the van must have water in their crates and that she would return the next day to evaluate the situation. The next day, Wible stated she had moved the four dogs out of the house and into pens. Wible immediately offered to surrender those four dogs to the Portage APL. The Agent could not see or hear any additional dogs inside the home. Wible accepted additional help from the Agent at that time, ultimately surrendering 39 dogs to the Portage APL through early August 2022.

In early August 2022, the Agent again responded to the address for a routine follow-up. Wible stated that she had potential adopters for the remaining dogs and was unwilling to surrender any additional dogs. The Agent continued to follow-up, visiting the property over ten more times between August 2022 and June 2023 in an attempt to make contact with Wible to ensure the dogs had been placed in adoptive homes. Wible never responded to any of the Agent's notices after their last meeting in August 2022, the van was removed, and the home appeared vacant and in disarray. There were no further tips received in Portage County about Wible.

The Agent's most recent visit to the property was June 5, 2023, which was a routine follow-up visit unrelated to the Parma investigation. Humane Agents are law enforcement officers that must have probable cause, which is reasonable cause to believe that evidence of a crime is

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present in the place to be searched, in order to obtain a search warrant. Given that there was no probable cause to believe that there were dogs inside the residence or even that anyone was residing at the address any longer, the Agent was unable to obtain a search warrant to enter the residence at that time.

Upon receiving a tip on June 15, 2023 about the pending animal cruelty charge against Wible that was related to deceased dogs at her Parma residence, the Agent obtained enough probable cause to seek a search warrant, ultimately making the horrific discovery that the Mantua home contained 146 deceased, decomposed dogs. Although the dogs' individual causes of death remain to be determined by necropsy (animal autopsy), it is clear that the dogs did not die humanely or as a result of euthanasia.

As a result of this discovery and information obtained throughout this investigation, the Portage APL Humane Agent has filed animal cruelty charges. Barbara Wible, the owner or manager of an animal rescue for dogs, has been charged with 25 counts of prohibitions concerning companion animals pursuant to Ohio Revised Code Section 959.131(G)(1).

These charges are all first-degree misdemeanor offenses pursuant to Nitro's Law and pertain to the lack of care and/or deaths of each of the 146 dogs discovered inside the Mantua home. In consultation with its prosecuting attorneys, the Portage APL has strategically elected to prosecute these offenses as the highest level of misdemeanor in the hopes of obtaining justice for these dogs in an expedited manner. The misdemeanor court process is generally a faster process that avoids grand jury, preliminary hearing, and the heavier docket schedules of felony court, and has the added benefit of the availability of remote technology for most court appearances. Wible is currently hospitalized with terminal cancer. Any conviction or punishment obtained in this case against Wible will likely be symbolic only.

"The needless suffering that these dogs endured is beyond comprehension. They deserve justice and the Portage Animal Protective League believes that even symbolic justice is justice. We will pursue Barbara Wible's case expeditiously in an attempt to ensure that these dogs get their day in court," said the Portage APL's Executive Director, Chalan Lowry.

The Portage APL has further charged the nonprofit animal rescue for dogs Canine Lifeline, Inc. with 25 counts of prohibitions concerning companion animals pursuant to Ohio Revised Code Section 959.131(G)(1). These charges are also first degree misdemeanor offenses pursuant to Nitro's Law and pertain to the care and/or deaths of each of the 146 dogs discovered inside the Mantua home. While there is no evidence that Canine Lifeline, Inc. operated with knowledge that would lend to felony charges at this time, these charges relate to the nonprofit's substantial lapse of due care, its negligence, that caused the neglect and ultimate deaths of the 146 rescue dogs. Despite a statement indicating that the rescue was cooperating with

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authorities, the Portage APL has not received any communication from the remaining board of directors of the organization.

“Since the story broke, we’ve received numerous tips and information that has been helpful to our investigation and we appreciate everyone who has reached out. This is also a good time to remind folks to report abuse or cruelty immediately to local law enforcement or humane society agent if you suspect someone.” Chalan added.

All parties are presumed innocent until convicted in a court of law. This investigation remains active and additional charges may be pursued. Anyone with knowledge or details about this investigation is asked to contact the Humane Agent, Holly Ebner at [humaneofficer@portageapl.org](mailto:humaneofficer@portageapl.org).

The Portage Animal Protective League is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and the only county humane society empowered to investigate and prosecute suspected animal abuse in Portage County. For more information about the Portage Animal Protective League, visit [www.portageapl.org](http://www.portageapl.org)

*(See attached photos)*