

**June 4, 2021**

**Bill C-205, An Act to Amend the Health of Animals Act  
Introduced by MP Barlow**

Dear esteemed Members of Parliament,

It is a great privilege to be able to address you directly, and to have the opportunity to voice an opinion prior to the potential amendment of the Canadian Health of Animals Act regarding Ag-Gag, Bill C-205.

I am sure you have received a lot of technical and statistical support both in favour and opposition to the proposed amendment. This brief is drafted as an opinion piece in an attempt to provide perspective that runs parallel to other considerations in this matter.

As a bit of background, I lived my life as a vegetarian who ate dairy products, eggs and fish for the majority of my life. I did this for many decades because I couldn't condone eating meat from chickens and farmed animals – but not because I didn't love it. In fact, surrounded by people who enjoyed lots of meat, I was often tempted and missed it very much. For all those years, I was content making what I considered humane animal choices that didn't take the life of the animal. As much as possible, I bought organic dairy and eggs and invested in wild fish thinking they led safer, idyllic lives compared to those on factory farms.

It wasn't until we brought home a family dog that my perspective started to change. Java quickly became our much beloved pet – a quiet, kind, brilliant and sensitive soul, an awesome athlete in the park, an alpha female when protecting her ball, and a poised lady with the grace of a model when walking. She is loved and infamous among the kids in the neighbourhood and is regularly invited for special occasion photo shoots, playdates, walks and sleepovers! She speaks without words, understands without being told, comforts unconditionally, and trusts us implicitly. She even has a great sense of humour! It honestly hadn't occurred to me that an animal could be so human.

Sitting with her one day, I realized for the first time that this exceptional soul is essentially made up of 28 lbs. of lean muscle, bone and gorgeous brown fur. It also dawned on me that in many places around the world her 'value' would be established based on these stats alone. With a twist of fate, that little bit of meat she would provide on someone's plate could have condemned her to a life of absolute misery and neglect. It was truly jarring to consider how many billions of animals annually, with the same beautiful, complex qualities, live without the opportunity for the love, freedom, dignity and respect that they so obviously possess. Wow Java, what privilege, you are a one-percenter!

In time, and with this new perspective, I began to slowly notice things on social media I had previously not noticed. I watched so many rescued chickens, pigs and cows, cats and dogs display absolute social awareness, brilliance and such affection. I saw horrific images of these same animals bloodied and tortured, pushed to their limit to produce valuable resources for their owners. I learned that male baby chicks are ground alive because they don't serve a purpose, and that cows are bred and sustained solely to give birth and painfully produce abnormal amounts of milk for consumers. Pushed to maximize the quantity of calves she yields, a cow endures difficult labour,

and each time loses her babies almost immediately as they are taken to factories that kill them soon after for veal. The cows protest and cry for days in vain, looking for their newborns, birth after birth. They are inseminated in the most cruel and painful ways that can only be described as rape, and when their weight and age has deemed them ready for slaughter, they endure several days on transport trucks without food and water, despite often extreme temperatures, sometimes succumbing to freezing cold, heat or crowded conditions. This is just the tip of the iceberg. How did I not know this before?

More importantly, do you know this? Are you getting all the information you need to make critical decisions for the welfare of animals in your care?

It seems obvious that these incredible animals we breed for our consumption and enjoyment should be treated with respect and dignity but in Canada, unlike a growing number of European countries, we do not even officially recognize them as 'sentient beings'. This increasingly sanctioned term gives animals the honour of being considered a being that feels pain, fear, happiness, can suffer, has emotional needs and is part of an established social structure.

Why is this important? Because without considering an animal a sentient being, we can ignore that it feels the abuse we systemically inflict on them. No one need be there to respond to their protests. They have no voice.

That is what this amendment is all about. The **welfare of farmed animals** is what has prompted this amendment. And this is the issue that must be solved in order to avoid Bill C-205.

There are various ways to ensure the safety and wellbeing of farm animals that do not infringe on the biohazardous issues purported by MP Barlow. Photographers have only forced their way into farms because the reasonable voices of those protecting farm animals are not being heard. The camera is their voice.

These photojournalists do not sacrifice their freedom for art, fame or pleasure. Their deep sensitivities make these investigations a nightmare for them but they endure because the cause is so profound.

They are aware they are trespassing but accept the consequences. They are a small handful of brave people who have the most absolute respect for human and animal wellbeing and would never seek to harm them or put biosecurity at risk. In fact, they are often covered in PPE to provide an extra layer of protection against germ transmission. These are highly skilled, responsible people seeking to expose the realities of what can happen behind closed doors.

Cameras in private settings is something we have come to accept as excepted practice in places such as schools, daycares, private homes, hospitals, policing, etc. It is, in fact, how we have discovered horrific abuses perpetrated by those without the power to defend themselves. Imagine the abuse that could potentially have been avoided in residential schools if cameras had been permitted. Sadly, it has proven to be the only proof available to protect our vulnerable.

Understandably, farmers would oppose strangers coming on to their property to catch them out on abuses, whether deliberate or accidental, although there is not a single documented case to date of an animal advocate introducing a biosecurity threat onto a farm. There are exponentially more cases of animals terribly abused than investigators causing biohazard issues. Contamination and disease on factory farms results from many of the same practices that spread Covid-19: farm staff working on multiple farms, sharing needles and equipment, spreading human diseases onto animals, and many other examples of poor adherence to biosecurity protocols. In fact, one might conclude that the farm workers themselves bring a much greater threat to the health security of a farm than a single investigator would.

Truthfully though, the job of investigating abuse should belong to government officials or neutral third-party professional organizations that can safely monitor maltreatment through silent investigations based on qualified tips, or spot checks. Many other organizations such as the restaurant industry are subject to the surprise visits that we rely on for public safety.

It makes no sense that the farming industry makes their own rules. Can you imagine the room left for abuses under these conditions? One need not look far on the internet to see many, many examples of horrific factory farm conditions. Again, this only matters if one recognizes that each and every one of these animals could be your pet. Farmed animals in Canada are all smart, extremely social, feel loneliness, pain, fear and love. How on earth do we allow that a dog, for example, deserves better treatment than any other animal with the same qualities. Canadians proudly aspire to respect all beings equally, especially those more vulnerable. In animal agriculture, sadly, we have not yet fulfilled this vision.

In MP Barlow's media release, he claims that the purpose of the Bill is to protect the biosecurity of animals and workers in order to ultimately protect the supply chain. Mr. Barlow, we can protect BOTH the supply chain AND the animals. In fact, it is your duty to do so in a way that is reasonable, fair and equitable to all parties involved. Please do not let the obvious interests of the animal farming industry pressure you to back off from your duty to protect all those under your care. Millions of sacred lives are being tortured each year due to lack of strict enforcement of animal welfare laws.

You might reasonably argue that truly humane conditions for animal farming would make meat, eggs and dairy products very expensive. I argue they should be expensive! This is the cost of raising animals in a humane way. We demand no less for the protection of those we raise to kill for our self-serving enjoyment.

Parliament members, this is not a partisan issue, this is akin to a human rights issue that should be self-evident. Please act on your life experience, personal values and responsibility for care to not allow this Bill to pass. MP Barlow, I implore you to find a smarter, alternate solution to this problem. There are so many options. Those who seek to protect animal welfare are not going anywhere. As more and more people become enlightened to the realities, more will demand better outcomes. MP Barlow, I hope you find yourself on the right side of this advocacy!

Personally, I am shocked it took me so long to wake up to the abuse of animals on factory farms in Canada. I suppose, like so many others, it never occurred to me that our decent country would

allow such horrific conditions to go un-checked. Canada ranks low among nations for animal welfare. Those that are in our care rely on us for their wellbeing. For those who do not respect that, we need strict laws and checks to enforce them. If you cannot see this, please abstain from voting on Bill C-205 and leave this legislation to those who care. How can we adore one animal and condone suffering in another?

Enlightenment breeds such positive change. I never imagined I would give up eggs, cheese and fish but in the last year, I have happily transitioned away from eating or wearing all animal products. I no longer miss any of it at all, and am excited about discovering incredible new recipes, people and investment opportunities. Best of all, I live with the contentment that comes from living a life that reflects one's values.

Please join me in creating legislation for all those that need your protection and care.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kathy Benjamin