



SCIL
Social Compassion
in Legislation

March 26, 2024

The Honorable Ash Kalra
California State Assembly
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: In Favor of Assembly Bill 2640, Pupil Instruction: Animal Dissection

Dear Assembly Member Kalra:

I am writing as a former college biology professor and the TeachKind science program manager at People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—PETA entities have more than 9 million members and supporters worldwide, including more than 996,000 in California. As proud cosponsors, we, along with the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine and Social Compassion in Legislation, would like to express our **strong support for Assembly Bill 2640, the Compassionate Learning Advancements for Science Students (CLASS) Act.**¹

AB 2460 aims to strengthen students' right to opt out of participating in animal dissection by requiring teachers to provide them with written notice of that right; to give them information regarding where the animals used in dissection are obtained, environmental concerns with animal dissection, and what chemicals students would be exposed to; and to ensure that their grades will not be affected by their choice to complete an alternative, animal-free assignment. The bill also strongly encourages schools to end their use of this educationally inferior practice in favor of more effective, ethical, economical, and environmentally friendly non-animal teaching methods by 2028.

Animal dissection has no place in modern classrooms. Students, educators, administrators, and legislators are increasingly seeking modern ways to accomplish the goals of anatomy education, including by using interactive computer software programs or hands-on realistic models.

The ethical benefits of replacing animal dissection include reducing suffering, which is at the heart of most students' objections to using animals in science classes. Each year in the U.S., an estimated 10 million animals are killed for classroom dissection. Exploiting them for this purpose—including capturing, confining, and painfully killing them—is inherently cruel. A 2018 investigation into Minnesota-based Bio Corporation, a leading dissection specimen-supply company *from which several California schools have purchased animal cadavers*, revealed that workers drowned fully conscious pigeons and injected live crayfish with latex.² The company

¹<https://www.peta.org/blog/class-act-seeks-to-empower-students-to-opt-out-of-animal-dissection/>

²<https://investigations.peta.org/birds-crayfish-dissection/>

was subsequently charged with 25 counts of cruelty to animals by the Alexandria City Attorney's Office.³

California law currently places the burden on students to speak up about their concerns regarding animal dissection, even though young people often face peer pressure, are frequently bullied for being different from their classmates, and typically don't want to experience confrontation with a teacher or school leadership. PETA hears from young people who are upset by dissecting animals and, as a result, are distracted and unable to learn the requisite material. Reluctant students participate out of fear of real or perceived retaliation or ostracism from their teachers and peers. Studies show that some students, especially girls, are even dissuaded from pursuing careers in science because they're so traumatized by the experience of dissecting animals in the classroom.⁴ Using non-animal methods creates a more inclusive, trauma-informed learning environment that doesn't risk alienating those who might be uncomfortable participating in classroom experiments on animals.

With regard to educational benefits, studies show that students who use non-animal methods perform as well as, if not better than, their peers who dissect animals, according to a systematic review published in *The American Biology Teacher*, a leading peer-reviewed science-education journal.⁵ Non-animal methods—such as eMind digital dissection software and synthetic dissectible models—also cut costs and reduce waste.⁶ And students taught using non-animal methods find the lessons more enjoyable than those who take part in dissection do, are more confident in their understanding of the material, and learn faster.⁷

Modern curricula, including the International Baccalaureate (IB), the Next Generation Science Standards, and the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) program, don't require animal dissection or even mention it. Rigorous IB and AP courses allow students to earn college credits without dissection, so there's clearly no reason for any course to include it. To read more about the issues surrounding animal dissection, please refer to "Cutting Out Dissection: Benefits of Non-Animal Teaching Methods," our fully referenced brief on the benefits of ending this practice.⁸

Classroom animal dissection exercises also waste public funds, and they expose teachers and students to toxic chemicals (e.g., formaldehyde, which is on the Proposition 65 list).⁹ The days are long gone when cutting open individuals was the only way to describe their internal anatomy, and students, animals, and educators all benefit from using superior, non-animal methods. After all, understanding anatomy, not learning to cut up animals, is the teaching objective.

We sincerely thank you for authoring AB 2640 and urge your colleagues in the legislature to vote yes on this measure that would protect students, enhance science education, save schools money, and spare animals immense suffering.

³<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/news/4386550-bio-corp-faces-25-counts-animal-cruelty-following-undercover-peta-video>

⁴https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249714226_Learning_the_scientist's_role_Animal_dissection_in_middle_school

⁵<https://online.ucpress.edu/abt/article-abstract/84/7/399/192198/Animal-Dissection-vs-Non-Animal-Teaching-MethodsA?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

⁶<https://online.ucpress.edu/abt/article-abstract/84/7/399/192198/Animal-Dissection-vs-Non-Animal-Teaching-MethodsA?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

⁷<https://www.peta.org/teachkind/2023-dissection-pilot-wrap-up/>

⁸<https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Benefits-of-Non-Animal-Teaching.pdf>

⁹<https://www.p65warnings.ca.gov/fact-sheets/formaldehyde>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Crowe', with a stylized, overlapping loop at the end.

Samantha Crowe, M.A.
TeachKind Science Program Manager
PETA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Merkley', with a stylized, overlapping loop at the end.

Ryan Merkley
Director of Research Advocacy
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'nickolaus sackett', in a lowercase, cursive style.

Nickolaus Sackett
Director of Legislative Affairs
Social Compassion in Legislation