Welcome to 2020: It’s a New Year and a New Session

Opening day is Wednesday, February 5 officially signally the beginning of the new 2020 session in the CT General Assembly. This year is considered a “short” session which means the legislature operates for a mere 3 months, adjourning at 11:59 p.m. on May 6, 2020.

What does that mean for animal welfare legislation? Well, in general it means everything will move at breakneck speed. Committee meetings convene early in the session and there will be very little time for hearings and final Committee decisions (JF) on a bill. The Environment Committee must take final action on Committee bills by March 25. Judiciary has a little more time but their schedule to give final approval of bills is March 30. In addition to timing, there are special rules during the short session that will affect bills: (1) to begin with all bills must be introduced by the Committee, and (2) unlike the “long session”, no bills can be introduced by individual members. Lastly, because so much has to be done in such a short time, there is little patience for any bill that will hold up floor debate and action. If it is going to be a problem, you can bet it won’t be considered this year.

So, in anticipation of this “short” session we have put together a “short” list of priority bills:

- **Co-existing with bears and other wildlife:** The first rule is “to do no harm” which means we are on the look-out to stop any bill that threatens a bear hunt or expanded hunting of wildlife. A coalition comprised of CVA, HSUS, CTLCV, Friends of Animals and Sierra Club-CT are working together to develop effective strategies. The coalition promotes humane methods to coexist with bears, such as increased public education and making it illegal to intentionally feed bears and other wildlife considered dangerous. For the past four sessions we have successfully fended off this threat to wildlife and we expect to do it again this year. With your help, protecting CT’s wildlife can be more than a promise.

- **Expand the application of Desmond’s Law** to give judges the explicit flexibility to appoint advocates in non-dog and cat animal cruelty cases. Current law limits appointment of an advocate to those animal cruelty cases involving a dog or cat. However, there have been several high-profile animal cruelty cases involving other companion animals such as rabbits, horses and goats. In a recent case the court appointed an advocate in a case involving 17 non dog or cat animals - mostly rabbits. While not a mandate, the proposal makes clear that the judge has the
- Advocate to stop the sale of inhumanely bred dogs, cats and rabbits in CT’s pet stores either through a Statewide prohibition or by removing the State pre-emption impediment so towns and cities may enact their own local ordinances.

- Support convening a special working group to review and make recommendations to overhaul the State’s animal cruelty statutes. The Commissioner of Agriculture has indicated an interest to update CT’s laws and CVA supports that effort.

- CVA Support for other bills that advance positive animal welfare policies. As is always the case, there are other bills likely to come up during the session which CVA will evaluate and support as appropriate. We’ll keep you posted as these emerge.

CVA’s Animal Advocacy 101 Workshops: Speak Up for Animals – Hands Down a Great Success

CVA launched its first ever animal advocacy workshops in New London January 4 and in Danbury on January 11, 2020 in partnership with the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut. The feedback has been unanimous. People listened, they asked questions and learned a lot about advocating for animals at the State Capitol.

It was a full program in both locations: CVA now has 120 educated citizen advocates ready to take on Hartford for CT’s animals. Each workshop had its own distinct panel of legislators talk to the audience, many of whom were their constituents. In New London we were fortunate to hear from State Representatives Holly Cheeseman (R-37) and Joe de la Cruz (D-41) who spoke to workshop participants about the importance of being involved and offered tips on the best way to reach legislators. Department of Agriculture Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt focused on the Department’s interest to update the state’s animal cruelty statutes, something CVA strongly supports. Former State Representative Diana Urban reinforced the need to update the cruelty statutes and proposed a report card on the humane treatment of animals in Connecticut so that the status of animals can be quantified and charted for all to see. Fox61 ran a positive story on the workshop including interviews with legislators in New London.

Danbury’s legislative panel was equally stimulating. State Representative Allie-Brennan (D-2) reiterated his promise to reintroduce a bill to stop importing inhumanely bred dogs, cats and rabbits in CT pet stores; State Representative Steve Harding (R-107), who is the ranking House member on Environment, spoke about the importance of making your voices heard for animals; State Representative Anne Hughes (D-135) passionately spoke about the injustice of animal cruelty and its indicator of human abuse and State Representative David Michel (D-146) stated his commitment to advocate for all animals in the legislature.

The legislators’ panels in both New London and Danbury were followed by three more units. A deep dive into CT’s legislative process was led by Joe Grabarz, a former State legislator, lobbyist with Gallo & Robinson and a CVA Advisory Board Member. The issues panel was next and focused on likely bills coming up this session: Pet shops and the sale of inhumanely bred dogs, cats and rabbits led by Deborah Bresch, ASPCA; Co-existing with bears and other wildlife discussed by Annie Hornish, HSUS; Desmond’s Law and Desmond’s Army with Zilla Cannamela; and proposals for animal cruelty reform led by Jessica Rubin, UCONN Law and CVA’s Board President. The final unit, lobby tips 101, was led by Jo-Anne Basile, CVA’s Executive Director.

Each workshop closed with a screening of the documentary A Dog Named Gucci. The movie was an inspiring end to the workshop and captured the meaning of the day by showing how committed people can make a difference for animals. Thank you to the filmmaker, Gorman Berchard, who was at each workshop to talk about the film and answer questions.
If you missed the workshop, soon CVA will post a video of the New London program on our website plus electronic versions of the workshop material. https://www.ctvotesforanimals.org/advocacy_101_workshop

The workshops may have been CVA’s first but they will not be our last. We are reviewing comments now to help plan for other workshops in the future. We’ll keep you posted.

A big shout out to Raina Spaziani of Keifer’s Kettle Korn, who provided her fabulous flavored kettle corn for the movie. As you know, no movie is complete without popcorn. keiferskettlekorn.com

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