

## Opinion: Few punished for cruel dogfighting

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The uncovering of a major dogfighting ring in New York and Connecticut has horrified many in the state. The months-long interstate investigation has so far netted more than a dozen people and resulted in the rescue of about 100 dogs. Three Connecticut residents were among those arrested, and 15 dogs were rescued from Orange and Meriden. A law enforcement authority in New York's Suffolk County called this one of the "largest and most brutal dogfighting rings this county has ever seen."

Using animals to fight is a sadistic and horrific form of animal cruelty. It is a bloody "sport" in which animals are mutilated and killed while betting is taking place. In 2007, the country was shocked to learn of football player Michael Vick's animal fighting ring, in which tens of thousands of dollars exchanged hands while the dogs were tortured and killed.

Recognition is due to Connecticut Attorney General William Tong, whose concern goes beyond the crime to the animals involved. His office is seeking permanent state custody to ensure the safe care of the abused dogs. "Dog fighting is cruel and illegal," Tong said. "These pit bulls were viciously abused and conditioned to be aggressive and violent fighters. Those responsible for these heinous crimes will be held to justice."

Unfortunately, when it comes to animal cruelty cases, Connecticut's track record is less than encouraging. According to a 2019 Office of Legislative Research report, there were 110 cases of animal fighting — typically dog and cock fighting — brought under Connecticut's animal cruelty statute from 2008 to 2018. Guilty verdicts were delivered in only 27 of the cases during that 10-year period; the remaining 83 cases were dismissed or dropped. This is not unlike the state's record of prosecuting other forms of animal cruelty.

CT Votes for Animals is calling for to take action on two fronts. First is finding a humane and compassionate way to handle the dogs. Taking a lesson from the Vick case, CVA asks that the courts move quickly to grant the state custody of all the dogs and then to find a humane placement where the dogs can heal and be rehabilitated. It is our hope that responsible expert organizations step forward and help give back a life that was so brutally taken away from each of these dogs.

CVA also calls upon the General Assembly to finally pass legislation criminalizing animal fighting paraphernalia as proposed by the Humane Society of the United States and supported by CVA in 2019 and 2021. Imposing penalties on the possession and sale of the implements used in animal fighting will give law enforcement one more tool to combat these loathsome crimes.

This is not a victimless crime. These dogs deserve a second chance, an opportunity to recover and time to trust again.

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