



Statement of
Jo-Anne Basile, Executive Director
Connecticut Votes for Animals
Regarding SB 388
Before the
Judiciary Committee
March 9, 2020

Co-Chair Senator Winfield, Co-Chair Representative Stafstrom, Vice Chairs,
Ranking Members and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee.

CT Votes for Animals (CVA) is a grass roots animal advocacy organization representing over 5,000 residents across the State of Connecticut. CVA members care deeply that Connecticut provides a safe and humane environment for all its animals. CVA speaks up for animals as a reminder to the public that a compassionate world is good for all and one in which we should all want to live.

CVA thanks the Committee for raising SB 388 and providing the opportunity for a discussion on this oftentimes underestimated but important section of the law.

CVA supports SB 388 but with reservations.

Several years ago, CT moved to the forefront of progressive jurisprudence with passage of Desmond's Law (PA16-30). Agreement to bring expertise in animal cruelty into the court room to further the interest of justice was revolutionary. CT's enactment of Desmond's Law started a movement. Today, multiple states, including New York, California, New Jersey and Illinois, are legislating similar initiatives and the State of Maine enacted its own version last summer. CVA commends the Committee once again for having the foresight to move the ball forward. Professor Jessica Rubin, who leads the animal law clinic at UConn Law and one of the original architects of Desmond's Law, is preparing a study that looks at the data on cases over the past several years to better understand how Desmond's law was used and helped in animal cruelty cases.

Unfortunately, CT has been less than "revolutionary" when it comes to its animal cruelty statutes. The statutes have not been reviewed in over 30 years, they have been added to periodically often creating redundant and some inadequate terminology that makes interpretations confusing and difficult to administer by law enforcement.

The beauty of the Committee's raised concept SB 388 is that it has the potential to allow experts to step back and look at the issue in its totality. This is something CVA believes is needed if CT is to move its animal cruelty laws into the 21st Century.

CVA believes to do this well requires any study to be guided by experts in the field. Those who have both academic and first-hand experience in the practice and application of animal law. Looking at trends nationwide, learning from the mistakes as well as positive outcomes from laws in other states becomes an invaluable lesson in any review. This is not an enormous task but CVA believes it is a critical one.

Why is it important to take a review of the state's animal cruelty statutes? A simple answer is that the current statutes are overlapping, at times contradictory, lack adequate terminology, and just need a good update. Like any other aspect of the law it's good practice to keep up with current thinking and trends in the field. Hopefully, a statutory review results in a better outcome for animals when the law gives clear direction to those who carry it out. But an equally important reason for this review is to better understand the link between animal cruelty and future violent crimes against others. As we tackle improving the law regarding cruelty to animals we begin to tackle the foundational causes of other criminal action. According to the National Link Coalitionⁱ "Animal maltreatment is often "the tip of the iceberg" and the first warning sign of an individual or family in trouble."

For many, animal cruelty is viewed as a simple misdemeanor, not an indication of a perpetrator's likelihood to commit other, oftentimes violent, crimes. But research in the past 20+ years clearly shows that taking a more serious look at these crimes is critical to address aggressive behavior towards humans.ⁱⁱ

- In 2001, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reviewed the existing research and determined that nearly two-thirds of inmates who commit crimes of aggression might also abuse animals.
- A 2010 Chicago Police Department study "revealed a startling propensity for offenders charged with crimes against animals to commit other violent offenses toward human victims." A 2007 survey of women in domestic-violence shelters indicated that 71 percent had partners who abused or threatened to abuse pets.
- In January 2015, the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System elevated animal cruelty to its own category in the system, to be tracked alongside crimes such as homicide and arson.

The statement from the National Link Coalition perhaps sums up best why animal cruelty should be taken seriously in the justice community: "***When animals are abused, people are at risk; when people are abused, animals are at risk.*** Increasing awareness of the link is encouraging legislators, community agencies, and caring people to take action by giving greater importance to suspected animal abuse, knowing that they may be also preventing other forms of violence."

CVA believes the Sentencing Commission can be a helpful partner to study CT's animal cruelty statutes. However, for a study to be viable it must include experts and

those with direct experience in animal law and animal cruelty. These experts should be used to determine the scope of work and review of the report before it is handed over to the Sentencing Commission. CVA recommends, at a minimum, representatives with practical or academic experience from the following categories be directly involved: representatives of municipal and state government, law enforcement, academia, and non-governmental organizations with an expertise or interest in animal cruelty and humane law enforcement.

The expert group is not unwieldy in size and does not have to meet more than a few times. But again, we believe these experts are key to an outcome that reflects real world experience coupled with an intellectually rigorous viewpoint of future trends and outcomes.

Once again CVA wants to thank the Committee for raising the concept and providing a platform for discussion. We believe there is broad merit to an inquiry and CVA is interested in a continuing dialogue to ensure it happens.

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ⁱ The National Link Coalition, Phil Arkow Coordinator, www.nationallinkcoalition.org

ⁱⁱ *The Atlantic*, STEFANIE MARSH, The Link Between Animal Abuse and Murder, AUGUST 31, 2017