



# NATIONAL LINK COALITION

*Working together to stop violence against people and animals*

**The LINK-Letter Vol. 16, No.12 December 2023**

*A monthly report of news from THE NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER*



**ON THE LINK BETWEEN ANIMAL ABUSE AND HUMAN VIOLENCE**

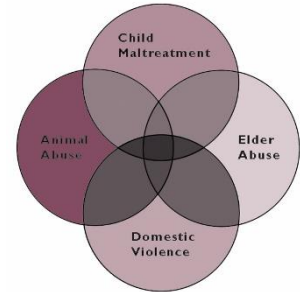


[www.NationalLinkCoalition.org](http://www.NationalLinkCoalition.org)

[Phil Arkow](#), Coordinator and Editor

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## ***A Holiday Appeal to our Loyal LINK-Letter Readers***

**"It takes a village to raise a child."**

**And to protect that child.**

**And the child's pets.**

**And mother.**

**And grandmom.**



Because animal cruelty, child abuse, domestic violence, and elder abuse are all LINKed. By preventing, prosecuting and punishing animal abusers, we better protect animals and prevent crimes against people. The National LINK Coalition is the only organization addressing all four LINKed forms of family violence.

In this holiday season of caring and giving, we are thankful for the many LINK-Letter readers who have responded to our initial appeals for help. Although we have been in existence and making tremendous progress for 15 years, in 2023 we took the bold step of formally incorporating as a nonprofit. We must now rely on the generosity of the LINK community to help sustain our work in 2024 and beyond.

**Thanks to the encouraging contributions that our loyal LINK-Letter followers have donated so far, we are a little more than half-way towards our goal of \$50,000 for 2024.**

But we still have a long way to go to keep the monthly LINK-Letter news and website resources flowing free, to bring LINK training to audiences across the U.S. and around the world, and to follow groundbreaking legislation that protects vulnerable people and their animal companions. We have built a global network of over 5,300 people who have made dramatic progress in addressing The LINK. By bringing humane and human services together, we are building a "global village" protecting all members of the family.

**Your year-end tax-deductible contribution can help us reach our goal. Can we count on you to help us? We cannot do our pioneering work for free and The LINK is in danger of disappearing.**

We offer unique, extensive resources that aren't available anywhere else in the world. Your contribution will enable us to continue to inspire and initiate truly significant achievements that protect animals and people:

- Publish a free monthly LINK-Letter reaching thousands of multi-disciplinary professionals who are carrying the LINK message forward in their fields.
- Update a resource-rich website, [NationalLinkCoalition.org](http://NationalLinkCoalition.org).
- Conduct dozens of live and virtual training programs.
- Compile the only LINK research bibliography with over 2,200 entries.
- Maintain the National Directory of animal, child, elder, and domestic abuse investigation agencies in over 6,500 U.S. cities and counties.
- Monitor over 130 legislative bills addressing animal cruelty's LINKs with other family violence, veterinary medicine, criminal justice, social services, and community crimes.

We kindly ask that your generosity this year include a donation to the National Link Coalition, so we can continue to be a unique voice for animals and people. Visit our website at <https://nationallinkcoalition.org/donate-to-the-national-link-coalition> to contribute safely and securely via PayPal or to send us a check or international wire transfer.

Thank you. All of us at the National Link Coalition wish you a happy, humane and healthy holiday season.

**DONATE**



## **What is The LINK?**

**Legislation...**

**Intervention...**

**Networking...**

**Knowledge...**

*...to protect **ALL** vulnerable members of the family*

## *ELDER ABUSE ... and THE LINK*

### **National Link Coalition Recommends Cross-Reporting and -Training in Federal Guidelines for State Adult Protective Services Programs**

The National Link Coalition has responded to a call for public comments on a proposed Rule by the U.S. Administration for Community Living that would create federal standards for Adult Protective Services programs which vary widely among the states. The lack of such standards leads to wide variation in policies and procedures, resulting in inconsistent service delivery across states and confusion for APS systems, the general public, and victims of adult maltreatment.



Nationally, this results in a fragmented and unequal system that can hinder coordination and lead to the absence of critical support for some people experiencing maltreatment.

Not surprisingly, community-based animal welfare organizations and agencies that can assist in such coordination and provide support for vulnerable adults whose animal-related issues impact their quality of life, health and safety, were conspicuously ignored. Our comments aim to close that gap.

Our comments were modeled after similar suggestions that we made in 2016 that were incorporated into the 2016 Final National Voluntary Consensus Guidelines for State APS Systems ([See the June 2018 LINK-Letter](#)). The 2016 Guidelines included three statements that addressed the gaps in including animal welfare issues that can potentially impact the well-being and decision-making of vulnerable adults:

#### **Program administration:**

- To improve communities' response to adult maltreatment, it is recommended that APS systems create policies and protocols to promote their collaboration with other entities during investigations and interventions, *including animal welfare organizations*.

#### **Receiving reports of maltreatment:**

- When receiving reports, the system should have a standardized process for eliciting and documenting the content of the report, including risks that may be encountered by an APS worker in responding to this report (*e.g., presence of animals in the home*).

#### **Conducting the investigation:**

- The needs/risk assessment needs to include criticality or safety of the client's environmental conditions *including presence of abused, dangerous or hoarded animals in the home*.

It is unclear whether the 2016 guidelines will be carried over into the new proposed Rule, or whether the earlier guidelines will be completely replaced.

In our most recent submission, we presented research statistics of APS caseworkers' encountering animal abuse, neglect and hoarding, and a case study from Arizona ([see article below](#)) that illuminates the current gaps in APS systems that fail to take into account the animals in vulnerable adults' lives.

Our submission includes the following recommendations:

- **Mandated Reporters:** While current policy and the proposed Rule leaves it up to each state to define which professions should be specifically named as mandated reporters of elder abuse, we believe that federal guidelines should recommend that municipal and county animal services officers, humane society/SPCA animal cruelty investigators, and veterinarians, who serve as first responders and medical professionals concerned with public health and safety, should be specifically identified. Cross-training and cross-reporting between adult and animal protection workers should be implemented accordingly, as several states have already done.
- **Mandatory Training:** The ACL proposal emphasizes a need for mandatory training of APS staff on core competencies which will lead to increased rates of investigation and substantiation; it is not specified what subject matter should be included in these training curricula. We recommended that seven Link areas which are regularly ignored by APS workers due to a lack of awareness and training should be included. These are: animal neglect; self-neglect to protect their animals; animal hoarding; denial of services by caseworkers unfamiliar with animal-related issues; jealousy over service animals; financial exploitation; and clients' emotional attachments and suicide ideation involving pets.
- **Investigation, Post-Investigation Services and Coordination with Other Entities:** The ACL proposal identifies several social service agencies that should coordinate with state APS, but predictably omits community-based agencies that can respond to animal-related issues that compromise the adult's health and safety. These include animal control/services, humane societies/SPCAs, and veterinarians. These agencies can also serve on APS multi-disciplinary teams and be part of standardized referral systems. We also recommended closer coordination with family courts which recognize the cross-overs between elder abuse and animal abuse within court processes, including protection-from-abuse orders. At least four states (Colorado, Missouri, Tennessee and Wisconsin) have expanded protection orders that include pets in domestic violence cases to cases involving vulnerable adults.

"Including community-based animal-related social services will result in more effective and holistic coordination and response. This will maximize the resources of APS systems, improve investigation capacity, ensure post-investigation services are effective, reduce the imposition of multiple investigations on adults who have been harmed, and help prevent future maltreatment," we concluded.

## Animal Cruelty Investigation Leads to Elder Abuse Charges in Arizona

A Chandler, Ariz. woman was charged with elder abuse and animal cruelty after several welfare checks allegedly found 55 dogs in horrid conditions and a house so filled with feces, urine and ammonia that it had to be condemned. News media reported that April McLaughlin, who ran an animal shelter for special-needs dogs, was arrested Sept. 22 on a felony elder abuse charge along with 55 counts each of animal abuse and cruelty of animals,



both misdemeanors. Her mother, Kathleen McLaughlin, 79, who reportedly has dementia, was living in the home. The Maricopa County District Attorney's Office initially declined to prosecute and sent the case back to the Chandler Police Department for further investigation, before charges were filed.

According to news media accounts, the Chandler Police Department began the initial investigation with a welfare check on June 30 after the mother told library staff she was being mistreated. Staff called Adult Protective Services which in turn called the police. When the mother reportedly told police she had no concerns about living in the house, the investigation was closed.

However, on Sept. 9 Arizona Humane Society agents, responding to complaints, visited the home and got the Chandler Police Dept. to get a search warrant and raid the house on Sept. 22.

Kathleen McLaughlin told news media that she had to go to the bathroom in the shower or outside because the home had no working toilet and she was forced to sleep on a small portion of the couch because all the dogs took up the bedrooms at the 956-square-foot home. The [Arizona Republic](#) reported that investigators found dead puppies stuffed in a freezer next to human food that McLaughlin was feeding her mother.

At last report, the Arizona Humane Society had reunited more than 40 of the dogs with their previous owners; 13 dogs were still being held under court order following a judge's denial of April McLaughlin's appeal to have them released back to her.

## *CHILD ABUSE... and THE LINK*

### Prosecutors and Veterinarians Sought for Child Abuse Research Focus Groups



**Katharine Wenocur, left, & Kirby Wyckoff**

"Professional Responses to Animal Abuse in Childhood: A Mixed Methods Exploration."

A team of researchers at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia are conducting a study to learn more about how various professionals respond when a case of childhood animal cruelty becomes known. Katharine Wenocur and Kirby Wyckoff are seeking participants for two virtual focus groups to explore their experiences with children who have harmed animals. Participation is voluntary and participants will be compensated for their time. The study is entitled

The two Zoom videoconference sessions are scheduled for:

- **Friday, Dec. 15**, 12 noon-1 pm EST for **veterinarians**. Participants must be involved in direct care for animals and have encountered at least one example of a child harming an animal in a professional capacity.
- **Friday, Dec. 15**, 12 noon – 1 pm EST for **prosecution professionals**. Participants must have a J.D. degree, work in a prosecutorial capacity in cases involving animal cruelty, and have encountered at least one example of a child harming an animal in a professional capacity.

To participate, please contact [Katharine.Wenocur@jefferson.edu](mailto:Katharine.Wenocur@jefferson.edu). Please forward this information to additional colleagues who meet the criteria for the study.



## *DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... and THE LINK*



### **Pet and Livestock Safekeeping Spotlighted in Saskatchewan Podcast and Research**

A Saskatchewan research network that coordinates and supports research aimed at ending violence, especially violence involving girls and women, has created a seven-episode podcast. [RESOLVE](#) – Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse – has launched the [RESOLVing Violence Podcast](#). One episode features an interview with Crystal Giesbrecht, Director of Research and Communications for PATHS – Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan -- on

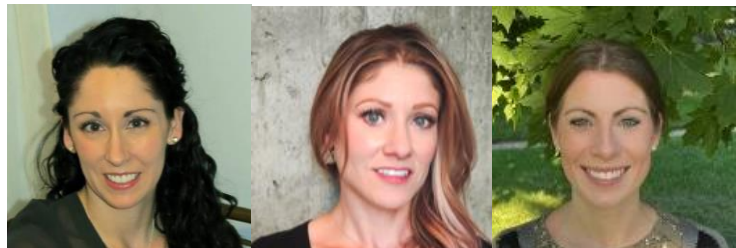
intimate partner violence and the role of animal safekeeping.

The episode sheds light on the importance of providing support for survivors of domestic violence who have animals, and the far-reaching implications of this issue. She emphasizes the availability of animal safekeeping programs offered by animal welfare organizations that allow survivors to temporarily keep their pets while in a domestic violence shelter or during temporary relocation. Her research underscores the significance of partnerships between animal safekeeping programs and domestic violence agencies or the police. Such collaborations ensure a comprehensive response to the needs of survivors with animals.

By bringing attention to the availability of animal safekeeping programs, the importance of collaborative efforts, and the need to address resource disparities, the episode serves as a call to action.

RESOLVE creates partnerships among service agencies, government departments and universities across the Canadian prairie provinces with offices in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Meanwhile, Giesbrecht and her colleagues have followed up on an earlier study that indicated that concern for the welfare of livestock, as well as companion animals, is a barrier preventing women in rural communities from leaving abusive homes ([See the April 2017 LINK-Letter](#)).



**From left: Crystal Giesbrecht, Amber Fletcher & Melissa Wuerch**

Their article examines the co-occurrence of violence against women and violence against animals based on interviews with 15 survivors in Saskatchewan. Qualitative data revealed complex dynamics of the human–animal bond for victims/survivors. Insufficient social supports were found to exacerbate barriers for people experiencing intimate partner violence leaving relationships when animals are present. In addition, participants perceived animals as crucial to their well-being. The care of horses and livestock is further complicated by financial issues and difficulty evacuating large animals. The researchers reported that survivors emphasized the need for social programs to assist survivors who care for companion animals and large animals.

-- Giesbrecht, C.J., Fletcher, A.J., & Wuerch, M.A. (2023). Intimate partner violence, animal maltreatment, and barriers to safety for survivors with companion animals and livestock: Findings from a qualitative study. *Violence Against Women*, 1-28. DOI: 10.1177/10778012231208985

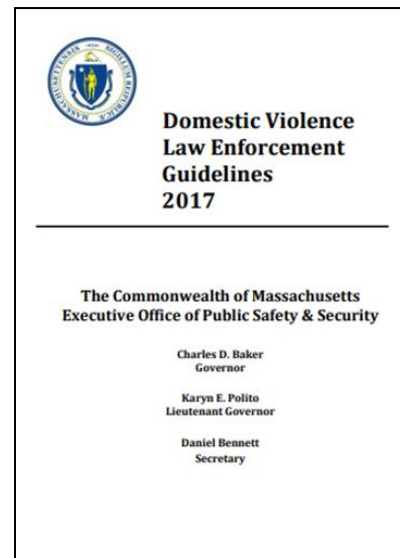
## *CRIMINAL JUSTICE ... and THE LINK*

### **Massachusetts Risk Assessment Form Includes Pet Abuse History**

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has included an offender's history of animal abuse in its High-Risk Assessment screening protocol to assess the dangerousness and lethality of those who commit domestic abuse.

The 67-page [Domestic Violence Law Enforcement Guidelines](#) published in 2017 by the Executive Office of Public Safety & Security includes as Appendix IV a one-page Sample High Risk Worksheet designed to assist responding officers in determining whether an elevated risk of death exists for the victim. Among the 22 questions in the battery of questions is "Has the offender abused animals/pets?"

Other high-risk concerns in the form address such risk factors as threats to kill the victim, a history of strangulation, extreme jealousy, substance abuse, excessive control over the victim's activities, threatened suicide, and access to firearms.



"The ability to assess the dangerousness and lethality of those who commit acts of domestic abuse is a critical element in violence intervention and prevention. Research shows that domestic violence homicides typically do not occur without warning. They occur most often in predictable patterns that escalate in severity and frequency. According to the research, there are approximately nine near-lethal incidents for every intimate partner homicide (IPH)," the Guidelines state.

"Risk assessment tools help us to gather and share information across systems – information which is critical to victim safety and offender accountability. Once high-risk offenders have been identified, we can begin to monitor the offender, ensure victims have the services they need, and manage the case with those two primary objectives in mind.

"By incorporating what we know about IPH and instituting risk assessment protocols for first responders, we can identify dangerous domestic violence offenders earlier, giving the system a better opportunity to interrupt the cycle of escalating violence before serious re-assault or a lethal assault occurs. Risk assessments encourage the system to look beyond an individual incident of violence and take a wider view of the history and patterns of abuse – a far better way to gauge the danger of a situation."

The risk assessment screen should be completed when there is a current or previous intimate relationship between the parties and the responding officer:

- believes a violent incident may have occurred,
- senses the potential for danger is high,
- is responding to repeat names or location, or
- simply believes one should be conducted.

It is not known how many other states utilize a similar screening tool that includes animal abuse as a risk factor for domestic violence homicide.

## Canadian Link Conviction Prompts Call for National Strategy for Law Enforcement and the Courts

In our [October LINK-Letter](#), we reported how a court in Calgary, Alberta had handed down the stiffest animal cruelty sentence in Canadian jurisprudence history – a 6<sup>-1/2</sup>-year prison term for Aleeta Raugust. Humane Canada – that nation’s federation of humane societies – has [detailed the back-story](#) of the case and called for a national strategy to ensure that police, animal protection officers judges, and prosecutors are trained to recognize The Link.

Raugust, 26, a diagnosed psychopath who tortured nine cats, killed seven of them and admitted to having thoughts of harming humans. In a classic case study of The Link, between 2018 and 2023 Raugust bought cats online with the intention of doing them harm. She recorded videos of herself torturing “two or three” to watch over and over – something that gave her pleasure. She left the cats’ bodies in public places so she could observe people’s reactions upon finding them. Raugust also admitted to having violent fantasies about hurting people when angered and told police she intended to burn down her former apartment building. A psychological assessment found she had little remorse for what she’d done. She pled guilty to nine counts of animal cruelty.



**Dennis Smithson & Margaret Doyle with an abused cat they adopted**

Calgary Police Sgt. Dennis Smithson, who has been instrumental in training 400 Calgary Police Service officers on The Link ([See the January 2022 LINK-Letter](#)), said the case is the perfect example of why violence Link training is so important and warrants investment by police forces and governments. With Raugust, a team of Calgary Police and Calgary Humane Society officers, crown prosecutors and forensic veterinarian Margaret Doyle – all trained to recognize the violence link – worked together to investigate and build the case.

Smithson’s team has expanded its Link training program today to more than 1,000 people across Alberta, including police and peace officers, the force’s domestic conflict and domestic violence risk assessment teams, dispatchers, analysts, record keepers, veterinarians, and women’s shelters staff.

The team’s close work and frequent communications has kept concerning patterns of behavior and cases from falling through the cracks. The trust and rapport they’ve built has bypassed the hesitancy that police agencies often have around sharing information, Humane Canada emphasized.



**Brad Nichols**

The lead investigator in Raugust received the Link training the same month she was put on the case. Bylaw officers had been collecting dead cats in the same lane for several weeks, under the assumption that they had been hit by cars. But when Sgt. Alanna Sherwood started investigating, she felt there were too many in the same area for that to be the case. “She knew right away there was a lot more to this and started digging,” Smithson said.

Sherwood involved Doyle to conduct necropsies on the cats. Coupled with the Calgary Humane Society’s resources, the team assembled a comprehensive file for the Crown prosecutor, who was also well-versed in the Violence Link and able to explain it to the court.



The collaborative efforts saw Raugust doubling the previous sentencing threshold. Smithson noted that since the team formed a decade ago, there have been more charges and convictions. “We’re putting people away for a number of years now as opposed to just fines and warnings not to do it again,” he said. “Like any other file that takes multiple units and multiple agencies, these cases are no different.”

Calgary Humane Society’s Brad Nichols agreed. “If we didn’t have access to the police and they didn’t have access to us, we’d both have incomplete toolkits,” he said. “We wouldn’t know what we don’t know, which is always a problem.”

Nichols said that it wasn’t long ago that a lifetime prohibition on owning animals was unheard of. “Seeing punitive and preventative measures put in place more often, and judges viewing animals as victims that can suffer, it’s very satisfying,” he said.

Smithson was shocked when the team found that 93% of individuals charged with animal abuse had also been charged or investigated for domestic violence, and 85% of them were involved in an average of four other criminal code offenses.

Nichols didn’t realize how unique their team was until they started presenting at conferences. “It became pretty evident not a lot of jurisdictions were collaborating like this,” he said.

Their unit has shown what can be accomplished with enhanced awareness that animal abuse files often have human victims as well. Smithson wants to see formalized Violence Link training in every police agency and academy. “Every time I present to members across Canada, there’s always an officer who comes to me after and says I wish that somebody had taught me this right from day one,” he said.

## A Call for a National Strategy

Humane Canada CEO Barb Cartwright said the Raugust case demonstrates what can be accomplished when agencies and experts trained to recognize and respond to The Link work together, and why it’s worth replicating



**Barbara Cartwright**

across the country. Humane Canada and its Canadian Violence Link Coalition partners are working to increase the focus on and recognition of the Link in legislation, policy, and law enforcement, criminal and social justice systems.

Cartwright is advocating for a national strategy to ensure police, animal protection officers, judges and prosecutors are trained to recognize The Link, and meaningful rehabilitation so offenders don’t escalate upon release. “In the Raugust case, even the judge expressed concerns about the day she gets out of jail,” she noted.

Cartwright says Canada should have a government-funded Violence Link center to foster a unified effort across sectors and agencies, to provide training, and collect animal abuse crime data across the country.

She noted that Canada’s response to mass shootings is already recognizing the potential predictive nature of animal cruelty. In its final report, the [Mass Casualty Commission](#) into Canada’s worst mass shooting recommended that “all individuals and entities engaged in data-collection research and policy development, including law enforcement agencies and other authorities, collect data on...whether the perpetrator had a history of harming or killing pets or animals, or threatening to do so.” The federal government has yet to act on the recommendations.

Cartwright said that while Raugust is a landmark case, it’s just the latest wake-up call to governments to invest in Violence Link training. “We can’t keep dealing with this in a piecemeal way,” she said.

## *VETERINARY MEDICINE... and THE LINK*

### **Veterinary Forensics Profile References The Link**

A [two-part feature](#) in the Veterinary Information Network's *VIN News* is bringing heightened awareness of the evolution of the new veterinary forensics discipline and how the perspectives of veterinarians and prosecutors about animal cruelty are changing as a result of The Link.

"Forty years ago, judges would say, 'I'm not going to ruin your life over a kitten.' They would reduce charges, or they might even dismiss charges," recounted Cornell University veterinarian Sean McDonough. "Well, no judge is going to say that nowadays because they have had enough training to understand that it's not just a kitten."



**Sean McDonough**

The VIN article describes that change of perspective as coming from a growing body of data, citing the National Link Coalition's [bibliography](#) of over 2,100 resources, that animal abuse often occurs in tandem with or as a precursor to crimes against people, especially domestic violence and child abuse. One result is that investigating and prosecuting animal cruelty is now widely understood as a way to help people, too.



**Randall Lockwood**

"One of the reasons why law enforcement started taking animal cruelty more seriously is the fact that the perpetrators of these crimes are people usually we really need to be concerned about," said Randall Lockwood, National Link Coalition Vice President and co-founder and one of the many non-veterinarians who helped establish veterinary forensics as a discipline.

Another National Link Coalition member, Martha Smith-Blackmore, who serves on our Professional Advisory committee, was interviewed about her career in veterinary forensics and how she is one of the inaugural students in Florida International University's master's degree program in veterinary forensic science investigation. The program is only the second of its kind in the U.S., following the University of Florida's program established in 2015; more than 237 students have completed that program and another 115 are currently enrolled.



**Martha Smith-Blackmore**

"We've seen very successful outcomes through the application of forensic science to animal cases," said Jason Byrd, a forensic entomologist who directs the University of Florida veterinary forensics program. "Successful prosecution rates ... are on the rise."

The article cites a VIN poll in which 73% of 1,850 veterinarians feel unprepared to handle cases of suspected animal abuse, and only 6% learned about their rights and responsibilities in veterinary school. It cited the National Link Coalition's [National Directory of Abuse Investigation Agencies](#) in 6,500 cities and counties to help veterinarians who do not know where to report their suspicions.

Smith-Blackmore encouraged more veterinarians to break free of their fears and report suspected cases. "I would love if we could change the prevailing attitude of 'I don't know; what if I'm wrong?'" she said. "Get rid of that temerity and that fear and step into it, because this is probably some of the most powerful work you can do."

**- Wogan, W. (2023, Oct. 11-12). Veterinary forensics comes of age. *VIN News***

## Link Training for Belgian Veterinarians Advancing

Veterinary students, assistants and practitioners in Belgium are beginning to learn more about their responsibilities in responding to suspected animal cruelty, abuse and neglect through a series of initiatives undertaken at Ghent University.



Leen Van Bretegem

Leen Van Bretegem, a forensic veterinary pathologist at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Ghent University, tells The LINK-Letter, "I am very committed to THE LINK and felt that I had to share my knowledge and experience as no information had been disseminated about THE LINK in Belgium. I contacted the government, and I received a grant from Minister Ben Weyts, responsible for animal welfare.

"With this grant, I created a lecture for veterinarians, veterinary students, veterinary assistants, and veterinary assistant students. The lecture covers domestic violence, animal abuse, and the LINK. Additionally, I explain how they can recognize, document, communicate, and report cases of animal abuse.

"On November 6th, I gave the lecture to the veterinary students at Ghent University in the presence of minister Ben Weyts and the press. It was a great success. As there is no training on animal abuse in the curriculum, the auditorium was filled with enthusiastic students. The board of directors of the faculty of veterinary medicine also considered this a crucial topic and intends to integrate the training as a fixed component in the curriculum from now on.

"In the coming months, I will be giving the lecture to veterinarians and veterinary assistants at various locations in Belgium. Additionally, I will be giving the lecture to the instructors who teach students in the veterinary assistant program. This way, they can raise awareness of the LINK among their students in the coming years.

"The first lecture received coverage in the Belgian press, and I have already been contacted by several organizations providing assistance to households affected by violence. These organizations are pleased that attention is finally being given to the issue, and they want me to also give the lecture for their employees.

"We have finally taken our first steps in Belgium towards raising awareness of the LINK and improving training to recognize animal abuse so we can make our community safer!"



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## Veterinarians' Reporting of Domestic Violence Parallels Animal Cruelty Concerns

The contentious issue of whether veterinarians should be mandated by law to report suspected animal abuse has a parallel antecedent in the origin of laws mandating physicians to report suspected child abuse, as detailed in a 2008 chapter by Phil Arkow and Helen Munro. Another analogous situation has recently been published describing why mandated reporting of domestic violence by physicians makes good sense.



Casey Gwinn, Gael Strack and Joyce Bilyeu

Casey Gwinn and Gael Strack of the Alliance for HOPE International, and Joyce Bilyeu of the Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center, write that few topics garner a more visceral reaction in the domestic violence and sexual assault movements than the issue of medical mandated reporting by medical professionals. They describe how advocates and professionals who support reporting argue that it provides for early intervention before serious injury or death even if the victim is too injured or terrified to make a report.

Meanwhile, those who oppose mandated reporting argue that some victims do not want doctors and nurses to report their abusers and therefore may not seek needed medical attention – an argument often raised by veterinarians who worry that clients' fear of veterinarians reporting them would simply stop bringing animals in for treatment.

The new article assesses the arguments for and against mandated reporting of domestic violence and concludes that the benefits substantially outweigh the drawbacks, citing the rise in domestic violence assaults in states like Kentucky that have repealed or rolled back mandated reporting.

--Gwinn, C., Strack, G., & Bilyeu, J. (2023). *Why medical mandated reporting of domestic violence still matters. Domestic Violence Report, 29(1), 1-6.*

-- Arkow, P. & Munro, H. (2008). The veterinary profession's roles in recognizing and preventing family violence: The experiences of the human medicine field and the development of diagnostic indicators for Non-Accidental Injury. In, F.R. Ascione, (Ed.). *International Handbook of Animal Abuse and Cruelty: Theory, Research, and Application*. Purdue University Press, pp. 31-58.

### *Join Us In Our Mission!*

**DONATE**

If you would like to join us in our education and advocacy to promote greater professional and public understanding of, and response to, The Link between animal abuse, domestic violence, child maltreatment, and elder abuse, please consider partnering with us! It is through the generosity of our donors that we are able to continue our trainings, publications, compilation of resources and research, and reporting on Link legislation. Your gift helps us prevent animal cruelty, domestic violence, child abuse and elder abuse and create a safer world. [Please click here](#) to make a secure and tax-deductible contribution.

## Online Course to Train Veterinarians in Animal Cruelty Investigations



**Kris Otteman (left), Linda Fielder & Emily Lewis**

Veterinarians and veterinary students, as well as any other individuals who are interested in learning more about animal cruelty investigations, are invited to register for an online, self-paced, 10 module course called Victim to Verdict, A Collaborative Approach to Animal Cruelty Investigations.

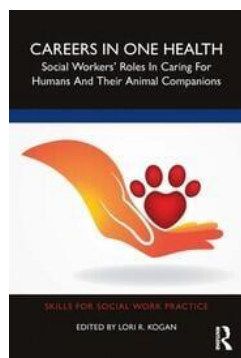
The course is based on the eponymous book by veterinarian Kris Otteman, from the Oregon State University Carlson College of Veterinary Medicine, and Linda Fielder and Emily Lewis, from the Oregon Humane Society ([See the March 2022 LINK-Letter](#)). The course, which is RACE approved for 6 hours CE, offers a unique opportunity for veterinary professionals to gain the skills and confidence to address animal-related crimes.

By bridging the gap between veterinary medicine and forensic science, the course will prepare participants to be better equipped to serve as an advocate for animal welfare and the pursuit of justice in cases of animal cruelty by deepening their understanding of and engagement in recognizing, reporting, and responding to animal abuse and neglect.

The syllabus includes information about The Link between animal abuse and human violence. The 10 modules are: Why Responding to Animal Cruelty is Important; Foundational Understanding of Criminal Law & Specific Animal Laws; How Animal Cruelty Investigations Happen; Recognizing and Reporting Animal Cruelty; Why the Veterinarian is Important to Animal Cruelty Response; Evidence Collection; Live Animal Forensic Examination; Forensic Necropsy; Report Writing; and Case Study and Conclusion.

[Register for the course](#) online. A \$100 discount is being offered until Feb. 2, 2024.

## SOCIAL WORK... and THE LINK



### New Textbook Advances Social Work Integration of Human-Animal Interactions

The recognition that social work needs to expand its social justice concerns to include vulnerable animals, animal-assisted interventions and human-animal interactions – coinciding with an evolution that is seeing animal welfare work becoming more human-centric – has taken a major step forward with the publication of a new book describing social workers' personal experiences in caring for humans and their animal companions.

*Careers in One Health: Social Workers' Roles in Caring for Humans and their Animal Companions*, is comprised of 68 chapters written by clinical, veterinary, psychiatric, and academic social workers. Each first-person account emphasizes the need to incorporate human-animal relationships, including the adverse Link issues of intersecting animal abuse and human violence, into social work practice and education.



Edited by Lori R. Kogan, Professor of Clinical Sciences for the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Colorado State University, the book's theme is that social workers play a critical role in the well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities and address barriers that impede their optimal life and well-being. Many social workers have begun to include animals in their definition of systems and family units, leading to innovative ways to incorporate animals and animal-assisted interventions in their work. As a textbook, it offers a rare opportunity for students to discover how the inclusion of human-animal relationships on the micro and macro levels can more effectively support both people and animals.

-- Kogan, L.R., Ed. (2023). *Careers in One Health: Social Workers' Roles in Caring for Humans and Their Animal Companions*. Routledge

## Update: Petition to Include Link and Human-Animal Bond in Social Work Education

In our [November LINK-Letter](#), we announced that an online petition drive was being launched to schools of social work, academics and professionals in related disciplines to advocate for the inclusion of non-human animals in social justice pedagogy and practice. We inadvertently neglected to include a hyperlink to the petition's organizer, Keara O'Bryen, so *LINK-Letter* readers could access the petition.



Keara O'Bryen

We apologize for any inconvenience. If you wish to sign the petition, please contact O'Bryen at [okeara74@gmail.com](mailto:okeara74@gmail.com) or at [keara.obryen@stonybrook.edu](mailto:keara.obryen@stonybrook.edu).

The National Link Coalition is concerned about the chronic gap in social work pre-professional training and continuing education that fails to recognize the presence and relationships of animals in the lives of social work clients. Emotional human-animal bond attachments and Link-related issues can affect clients' quality of life, environments, decision-making, and potential escalation into other family violence. These issues are conspicuously ignored. A National Link Coalition study found that less than 3% of BSW and MSW programs in the U.S. mention human-animal relationships in the curriculum, and when they do it is invariably only peripherally in an elective. Field placements in animal shelters are also exceedingly rare.

O'Bryen's petition seeks to encourage the Council for Social Work Education to include other animal species in the curriculum's Core Competencies needed for accreditation, and to prompt the National Association of Social Work to include this topic in the profession's Code of Ethics.

### *Permission to Reprint*

The news contained in *The LINK-Letter* are intended to disseminate as widely and as freely as possible information about the connections between animal abuse and interpersonal violence. Permission is hereby granted to re-post these articles in other newsletters, websites, magazines, and electronic publications provided that appropriate credit is given to the National Link Coalition and with hyperlinks to [www.nationallinkcoalition.org](http://www.nationallinkcoalition.org).

### *For Additional Information*

Just click on the [blue underlined hyperlinks](#) in these articles and it will take you to other websites with additional information about that topic.

## *ANIMAL HOARDING ... and THE LINK*

### **National Link Coalition Acquires HARC Resource Materials**

The National Link Coalition is proud to announce that we have acquired many of the extensive library and resource materials that were developed over many years by the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium. HARC was established in 1997 at the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University in Massachusetts. This interdisciplinary group pioneered research and innovative interventions to address animal hoarding -- an important, misunderstood, and under-recognized community problem that affects human and animal welfare, animal suffering, property damage, economic and environmental burdens to communities, adult self-neglect, and places children, elders, and dependent adults at serious risk.



**Gary Patronek**

HARC's work, which involved psychiatry, psychology, social work, sociology, veterinary medicine, epidemiology, and humane law enforcement, laid the global groundwork for better characterizing the psychological and sociological underpinnings of animal hoarding. HARC helped quantify the frequency and outcomes for animals, people, and communities. Its peer-reviewed papers, resource manuals, guidelines for intervention and case management, media interviews, and training programs did much to increase awareness of the problem and help agencies in developing an integrated approach that encompasses all stakeholders.

When Tufts University retired the availability of these resources on its website, the National Link Coalition reached out to HARC co-founder Gary Patronek. The result is [a new page on our website](#) and an extensive collection of HARC resources within the [Animal Hoarding section of our Link bibliography](#).

We thank the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium for their many years of dedicated work raising awareness of this important issue and for their ongoing individual efforts to continue to protect vulnerable animals and people.

## *THE LINK in the LITERATURE*

### **Multinational Study Links Child and Animal Sexual Abuse**

A recent study of child sexual abusers is reporting a highly significant Link between offenses against children and animal sexual abuse. The study of 4,924 men from Australia, the U.K., and the U.S. found that participants who reported sexual feelings towards or a history of offending against children, were 11 times more likely to have watched violent pornography, 17 times more likely to purchase online sexual content, and 27 times more likely to intentionally watch bestiality than men with no sexual feelings towards or history of offending against children.

-- Salter, M., et al. (2023). *Prevalence and risk factors for child sexual offending online and offline in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Findings presented at the PIER23 Conference: Tackling Online Harms – A Whole System Response. Cited in: We Protect Global Alliance (2023). Global Threat Assessment 2023: Assessing the Scale and Scope of Child Sexual Abuse Online.* <https://www.weprotect.org/global-threat-assessment-23/>

## Study Reports Link between Intimate Partner Violence and Carnivore Diet

In what may be the first published research correlating a link connection between intimate partner violence and the consumption of animal products, a survey of students at the University of Connecticut reported that animal consumption was associated with higher use of physical and psychological intimate partner aggression. Animal consumption was also associated with higher speciesism, and speciesism was associated with higher use of physical and psychological intimate partner aggression.

The authors hypothesized that animal consumption is an integral part of speciesism, the belief that animals have lower inherent moral worth than humans, which is associated with other prejudicial social dominance such as sexism and homophobia. Given that speciesism may be associated with negative views of women, and that power and control attitudes often underlie abusive behavior, they suggested that eating animal products may be linked to an increased risk for intimate partner aggression.

The survey of 245 students found that participants whose diets included a higher percentage of animals were more likely to report greater physical and psychological intimate partner aggression during their lifetime and more speciesism. Greater animal consumption was not associated with higher depressive symptoms, suggesting that the consumption of animal products does not lead to mental health problems that could contribute to intimate partner violence.

The authors cautioned that the study is limited by its relatively small sample size, its including only undergraduate students rather than a larger community sample, and the need to examine other relevant social, attitudinal, biological, and nutritional variables and models that might also explain the associations obtained in the study.

-- Taft, C.T., Hamilton, E.G., Leviyah, X., Gnall, K.E., & Park, C.L. (2023, April 29). Animal consumption associated with higher intimate partner aggression. *Journal of Family Violence*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00556-0>

## Spanish Study Addresses Link in Santeria Ritual Sacrifices of Poultry

A new research study from Spain – believed to be one of only a few to describe veterinary forensics findings in a case of birds sacrificed in a religious Santeria ritual – emphasizes how the strong correlation between animal abuse and interpersonal violence raises an additional issue in identifying these cases. The researchers, based in public health and veterinary medicine at the University of Madrid, write that animal victims of human cruelty are receiving increasing attention from the press and society. Veterinary pathologists and civic authorities have a duty not only to elucidate the cause, method and manner of death but also to address the motivation behind a case. While poultry are commonly used as offerings to gods in Santería rituals, only a few cases have been reported in scientific journals. The authors believe this study to be the first post-mortem description of lesions in a domestic avian species due to religious rituals. They note that civic authorities, police officers and forensic veterinary pathologists must deal with many hypotheses behind the act of animal abuse itself, such as domestic violence, psychopathic behavior or religious cults. They encourage European Union and Spanish forensic practitioners to be aware that these ritual sacrifices occur and that future European and national legislation updates should consider this type of animal abuse.

-- Vázquez-Fernández, E., Rebollada-Merino, A., Chinchilla, B., Porras, N., & Rodríguez-Bertos, A. (2023). Forensic investigations of religious rituals involving poultry: A case report. *Journal of Comparative Pathology*, 207, 91-95.

## Building LINK AWARENESS

### Link Cited in Campaign to Update India's Animal Protection Law

Efforts to update India's Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, enacted in 1960, are beginning to cite The Link between animal abuse and human violence as a rationale for modernization (*See the [June 2016 LINK-Letter](#)*). A news article in [India Today](#) asking psychologists and attorneys to explain the causes of animal abuse in response to waves of animal cruelty cases included The Link.

Psychologist Tannu Saini said that animal cruelty in India is inflicted out of ignorance and poverty, as well as entertainment, since animals constitute a vulnerable group. Traits associated with animal cruelty include low empathy, callousness, histories of abuse or neglect, mental health disorders, substance abuse, and other factors.



Tannu Saini



Shreya Paropkari, a lawyer and a consultant with Humane Society International/India, described research demonstrating a Link between those who inflict animal cruelty and their likelihood to demonstrate aggression and violence toward other vulnerable members of society. Protecting animals could be used as a preventive measure to protect humans, she noted. "When acts of animal cruelty go unnoticed or unpunished, it erodes the public's faith in law enforcement and creates a perception of indifference towards injustice."

Shreya Paropkari

The article explained how trauma — particularly childhood trauma caused by abuse or neglect — alters people's ability to manage their emotions, making them more likely to be aggressive towards animals and other people. It described the Link between animal abuse and domestic violence, as well as other criminal activity, emphasizing that mental health issues are often at the root of all kinds of violence.

Because of the Link between animal abuse and other forms of violence, Saini highlighted the importance of teaching children to respect all living things. However, she suggested that such an education strategy should be accompanied by public awareness campaigns about animal mistreatment and all that it entails, including that animal cruelty affects more than just the animal victims.

## CoPPA Spanish-language Infographic Builds Link Awareness

[CoPPA](#) – the Coordinadora de Profesionales por la Prevención de Abusos – since 2019 has been distributing this handy [infographic](#) to domestic violence programs, veterinarians and public venues across Latin America and in several Spanish cities. The organization, based in Geneva, Switzerland, was formed in 2012 as a multidisciplinary and independent group of professionals from psychology, psychiatry, law, sociology, criminology, education, and human rights with a focus on defending and protecting vulnerable individuals, groups and communities. CoPPA supports and promotes legislative and educational projects, government programs and strategic actions.



## THE LINK... IN THE LEGISLATURES

Only a few state legislatures are still in session, but the impetus for addressing animal abuse's Links with human violence shows no signs of letting up. **137 bills** were introduced in 2023 in the U.S. and Canada – and **15 have been signed into law**. We have highlighted below the bills that have been enacted or are still pending. Please join us in following their progress and alert us of any additional bills we may have missed!

### Bills We're Watching:

#### *Domestic Violence/Pet Protection Orders*



**H.R. 3957, the PUPP Act of 2023 (Providing for Unhoused People with Pets)** would authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to make grants to modify and upgrade structures that serve as interim and permanent housing for unhoused individuals with pets, and to provide supportive and veterinary services. It was referred to the House Agriculture and Financial Services Committees' Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry.



**S. 2734, the PAWS (Pet And Women Safety) Reauthorization Act of 2023** would re-authorize the federal PAWS Act provisions passed in 2019 – making \$3,000,000 available annually to help domestic violence shelters build facilities to accommodate pets and enabling pet protection orders to be enforced across state lines – to be continued from 2024 to 2028. The bill is in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry



**California SB 89** would expand the definition of stalking to include willfully, maliciously and repeatedly follows or harasses another person and who makes a credible threat with the intent to place that person in reasonable fear for the safety of that person's pet, service animal, emotional support animal, or horse. The bill passed the Senate and was sent to the Assembly Public Safety Committee.



**Colorado HB 23-1107** will continue to allocate annual funding indefinitely to the state domestic violence and sexual assault services fund for governmental and nonprofit agency programs that provide services for crime victims, including attending to the needs of companion animals. (The fund was set to expire in 2027.) **The bill was signed into law on May 25.**



**Delaware HB 95** requires the Family Court to award possession and provide for the care of companion animals when dividing marital property after considering the well-being of the companion animal, including: each party's ability to care for it; their attachment to it; and the time spent during the marriage tending to its needs. **It was signed into law on June 27.**



**Delaware SB 70** adds engaging in cruelty to or inflicting or attempting to inflict physical injury to a companion animal to the definition of abuse for protection-from-abuse proceedings. It provides specific authority for the Court to include provisions in a protection-from-abuse order that grant a petitioner exclusive care, custody, or control of a companion animal and order a petitioner to stay away from the companion animal. **It was signed into law on June 27.**







**Massachusetts H.1702 and S.1019** would expand existing laws that allow courts to include animals in domestic violence protection-from-abuse orders to also include the statutes covering stalking harassment. The bills are in the Joint Committee on the Judiciary.



**Massachusetts H.4115** would add “coercive control,” including committing or threatening to commit cruelty to animals connected to a family or household member, to the definition of abuse. “Coercive control” is “an act or pattern of behavior committed with the intent to substantially restrict an individual’s safety or autonomy through threat, intimidation, harassment, isolation, control, coercion or compelled compliance.” The bill is in the House Committee on Ways and Means.



**Nebraska LB 157** allows domestic violence victims to file for protection orders that allow courts to direct the care, custody and control of household pets and enjoin the respondent from coming into contact with, harming or killing household pets. The bill was signed into law on June 6.



**New Jersey A4229/S 1789** would expand the statutory definitions of domestic violence, child and elder abuse, and abuse of persons with a disability to include acts of animal cruelty against those persons’ animals. The bills are in the Assembly Agriculture & Food Security and Senate Environment & Energy Committees.



**New York A 39 and S 5309** would provide further protection for pets in domestic violence protection orders by authorizing the court to order a party to either relinquish a companion animal or to refrain from any contact with it. The bills are in the Assembly Judiciary and Senate Children & Families Committees.



**New York A483** would amend the penal law to create new crimes of animal cruelty when a companion animal is intentionally injured or killed in order to intimidate, threaten or harass a family member; it would be a Class D felony, or a Class C felony if committed in the presence of a minor child. The bill is in the Assembly Codes Committee.



**New York A 1276, “Bella’s Law,”** based on the premise that “animal cruelty is a serious problem and that individuals who harm and abuse animals are statistically more likely to engage in domestic violence and child abuse,” would require animal cruelty investigators to inform the Office of Children and Family Services who must further investigate the accused individual and coordinate its findings with the referring or prosecuting agency. The investigation would determine whether the accused or investigated party has any associated family or domestic violence. CFS would not be notified if it would jeopardize an ongoing investigation or the safety of an individual, or if it is clear the accused has no family members. The bill is being held for consideration in the Assembly Children & Families Committee.



**New York A 5504** would require every county in the state to have sufficient residential and non-residential domestic violence services and care for victims and their children. Residential shelters’ programs could include therapy dogs and companion animals as well as service animals. The bill is in the Committee on Social Services.



**New York S 5935 and A 5040** orders the Office of Court Administration to issue free wallet-sized laminated “Hope Cards” to petitioners who have been granted a final order of protection. Hope Cards will contain information about the respondent and any other individuals or companion animals covered under the protection order and be as valid as a paper order of protection. **S 5935 was signed into law by the Governor on Oct. 23.**



**New York A 7903 and S 7608** would enable veterinarians to receive up to three hours of continuing education credit for providing pro bono veterinary care services to individuals in domestic violence and homeless shelters. The bills are in the Assembly Higher Education and Senate Rules Committees.



**Pennsylvania HB 1108**, recognizing that “companion animals are living beings that are generally regarded as cherished family members that offer their owners companionship, security and assistance” and “occupy a special category of personal property which does not include inanimate property,” would allow parties in a divorce settlement to enter into an enforceable contract dictating the possession and care of pets based on which party could provide the best care and social interaction. The bill was approved by the House and sent to the Senate Judiciary Committee.



**Pennsylvania HB 1210** would amend the Domestic Relations title to allow courts to grant temporary ownership rights over companion animals in protection orders and direct defendants from harming, possessing, transferring, or relocating the animal. The bill was approved by the House and sent to the Senate Judiciary Committee.



**Washington HB 1562** prohibits individuals who have been convicted of animal cruelty in the second degree, domestic violence, coercion, stalking, or cyberstalking or violation of a protection order, from having unlawful access, control or possession of a firearm for five years. The bill’s preambles states, “The strongest predictor of future violence is prior violent behavior, including perpetration of domestic violent misdemeanors,” and calls cruelty to animals a “particularly strong risk factor.” The bill passed the House and Senate and **was signed into law on May 4.**



**Canada Bill C-21** would amend the Firearms Act to prevent individuals who are subject to a protection order or who have been convicted of domestic violence, which includes threats or harm to another person’s animals, from obtaining a firearms license. The bill passed the House of Commons and had its 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading in the Senate on June 21 and was referred to the Standing Committee on National Security, Defense and Veterans Affairs.



**British Columbia Bill 17** amends the Family Law and gives divorcing parties options to jointly or exclusively own their companion animals. It allows courts to consider the animals’ best interests and the family’s history of violence in ordering ownership of the animals as part of a divorce settlement. **The bill received Royal Assent on May 11.**



## *Animal Hoarding*



**New Jersey S 1144** establishes the crime of animal hoarding and requires mental health counseling for all adult and juvenile animal cruelty and hoarding offenders. The bill is in the Senate Energy & Environment Committee.

## *Animal Sexual Abuse*



**Connecticut HB 6714** defines “sexual contact with an animal” and a new misdemeanor crime of “sexual assault of an animal” which includes sexual contact and creating or distributing photographic images of sexual contact with an animal. Law enforcement and animal control officers can now seize any animal believed to be victimized for veterinary examination and treatment. Convicted offenders would be barred from having any contact with animals for 5 years. **The bill became law on June 15.**



**Maryland SB 54 and HB 131** eliminated a statute containing the archaic terminology of “unnatural or perverted sexual practice” referring to oral sex with animals or other persons. Another statute already prohibits “sexual conduct with an animal” in more detail as a felony act of aggravated cruelty to animals punishable by up to three years in prison and/or a \$5,000 fine. It will take effect on Oct. 1. Each bill passed its respective chamber and the measure **became law without the Governor’s signature.**



**New Mexico SB 215**, the Animal Sexual Abuse Act, would establish crimes of bestiality and aggravated bestiality, with felony-level penalties upon conviction. Those convicted of these crimes would be registered as sex offenders, would be banned from keeping or caring for animals, and may be ordered to submit to psychological assessment and counseling. The bill passed the Senate and House unanimously and **was signed into law on March 30.** It became effective June 16.



**New York A 1865** would make sexual conduct with an animal that results in the animal’s injury or death a felony. Convicted offenders would be required to: relinquish and permanently forfeit custody of all animals; be barred from working or volunteering in a place with unsupervised access to animals; and reimburse animal shelters and veterinarians for costs of care and treatment. The bill is in the Assembly Agriculture Committee.



**Pennsylvania SB 852** would permit limited access to criminal records of certain individuals convicted of felonies. Individuals convicted of sexual intercourse with an animal within the previous 15 years would not be eligible for such limited access. The bill is in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

## *Animal Abuse and Child Maltreatment*



**Massachusetts S.90 and H.198** would give the Department of Children & Families the right to request that pre-adoptive parents or foster parents provide a behavior/temperament assessment, histories of dangerous incidents, spay/neuter status, the number of animals in the home and their housing conditions, and/or veterinary records of any animal maintained on the premises; DCF could not restrict placement of a child solely based on the presence of any particular breed of dog in the home. The bills are in the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities.



**New Jersey A 4229/S 1789** would expand the statutory definitions of child and elder abuse, domestic violence and abuse of persons with a disability to include acts of animal cruelty against those persons' animals. The bills are in the Assembly Agriculture & Food Security and Senate Environment & Energy Committees.



**New York A483** would amend the penal law to create new crimes of animal cruelty when a companion animal is intentionally injured or killed in order to intimidate, threaten or harass a family member; it would be a Class D felony, or a Class C felony if committed in the presence of a minor child. The bill is in the Assembly Codes Committee.



**New York A 394 and A 1430** would increase the penalties for acts of aggravated animal cruelty when committed in the presence of a child. The bills are in the Assembly Agriculture and Judiciary Committees, respectively.



**New York A 444** would establish a misdemeanor crime of knowingly causing a minor to attend an animal fight. The bill is in the Assembly Agriculture Committee.



**New York A 3346-A and S 3170-A, "Kyra's Law,"** would allow courts to consider a person's threats to harm or kill emotional support or comfort animals among the risk assessment criteria in determining that person's visitation and custody rights in a child abuse proceeding. The bills are in the Assembly Judiciary and Senate Codes Committees.



**Pennsylvania SB 55**, citing a duty to protect all children in the Commonwealth and defining domestic abuse as a pattern of abuse within the family or household that can include abuse of a partner, spouse, child or pet, would order courts determining child custody that is in the child's best interests to consider a party's conviction for sexual intercourse with an animal, cruelty or aggravated cruelty to an animal, animal fighting, or possession of animal fighting paraphernalia. The bill would also permit the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts to develop and implement an ongoing education and training program for court officials on "all aspects of the maltreatment of children," including the impact of child abuse and domestic violence – but not exposure to animal cruelty. The bill is in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

### *Cross-Reporting*



**Connecticut HB 6714** requires veterinarians to report reasonable suspicions that an animal has been harmed, neglected or treated cruelly due to participation in animal fighting to the local law enforcement agency or animal control officer. Veterinarians who make such reports in good faith are immune from civil liability. **HB 6714 was signed into law on June 15.**



**Delaware SB 71** requires law enforcement agencies, the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families, and the Department of Justice to report suspected animal cruelty to the Office of Animal Welfare that is discovered while performing their responsibilities in child welfare cases. It also provides immunity to people who in good faith report suspected animal cruelty. **The bill was signed into law on June 27.**





**Massachusetts S.82** would require animal control officers, who are already mandated to report suspected child abuse, to complete an evidence-based training, approved by the Office of the Child Advocate, on child abuse and sexual abuse. Current law only states that mandated reporters must complete training. The bill is in the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities.



**Minnesota SF 3324 and SF 3300** would require Office of Animal Protection personnel to report suspected child and elder abuse to the Department of Human Services; child and adult protective services employees would be required to report suspected animal cruelty to the Office of Animal Protection. All reporters would be immune from civil and criminal liability if the report is made in good faith. [The bills](#) are in the Senate Judiciary & Public Safety and House Public Safety & Finance Committees **for the 2024 legislative session.**



**New Jersey A 4229/S 1789** would require veterinarians, veterinary technicians, domestic violence investigators, employees of the Department of Children & Families, employees of the Department of Human Services, Division of Aging, police officers, and caregivers at residential health care facilities to report suspected animal cruelty to an appropriate law enforcement officer with civil and criminal immunity for reporting in good faith. The bills are in the Assembly Agriculture & Food Security and Senate Environment & Energy Committees.



**New Jersey A 4936** would allow employees of the Division of Children Protection and Permanency who investigate child abuse and neglect and have reason to believe that an animal has been subjected to, or who witness an act of animal abuse, cruelty, or neglect, to report the suspected or witnessed act of animal abuse, cruelty, or neglect. Nothing in the bill requires an employee to report such an act. Employees who make a report, provide records or information relating to the report, or who testify in any judicial proceeding arising from the report, would be immune from liability for any actions taken in good faith. The bill is in the Assembly Agriculture and Food Security Committee.



**New York A 3908 and S 5947** would require any person charged with enforcing laws prohibiting cruelty to animals to cause a report to be made when, in the performance of his or her duties, such person has reasonable cause to believe that abuse or maltreatment of a child has also occurred; a person charged with the responsibility of filing a report of child abuse or maltreatment would also be required to file a report of suspected animal cruelty. The bills are in the Assembly and Senate Children & Families Committees.



**New York A 5405** would cause the Attorney General to establish a 24-hour toll-free animal abuse hotline and inform the public of its existence. Hotline personnel would transmit reports received to appropriate law enforcement or animal protection organizations. The bill is in the Committee on Governmental Operations.

### *Psychological Evaluation and Therapeutic Interventions for Offenders*



**U.S. H.R. 56, the RAISE Act** (Reforming Alternatives to Incarceration and Sentencing to Establish a Better Path for Youth Act of 2023) would have the Bureau of Prisons establish a two-year pilot program, in at least 10 judicial districts, to equip incarcerated youths with the skills to provide therapy and training to animals seized by federal law enforcement and to organizations that provide shelter and other services to abandoned, rescued or otherwise vulnerable animals. The bill is in the House Judiciary Committee.





**California AB 829, the Animal Cruelty and Violence Intervention Act** will expand current required counseling for violations under penal code section 597 to several other sections pertaining to serious animal abuse crimes, such as malicious violence, willful poisoning and bestiality. It also requires the court to consider a mental health evaluation for individuals convicted of serious animal abuse as defined by California law, with the option, depending on the results of the evaluation, of requiring treatment. The bill still allows judges to order those convicted of lesser animal abuse crimes to complete an education-based course. **The bill was signed into law** by Gov. Gavin Newsom on October 9.



**Massachusetts S.1142** would allow courts to order psychiatric, psychological or mental health evaluations and treatment for animal abuse offenders. Completion of counseling, anger management, humane education or other treatment programs designed to address the underlying causative factors for the violation could result in any imposed fines being suspended. The bill is in the Joint Committee on the Judiciary.



**New Jersey S 1144** would establish the crime of animal hoarding and require mental health counseling for all adult and juvenile animal cruelty and hoarder offenders. It is in the Senate Energy & Environment Committee. **S 1153 and A 4540 (“Shyanne’s Law”)** would require mental health evaluation for all animal cruelty offenders; that bill is in the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee.



**New York A 433, A 1507 and S 294 (“Buster’s Law”)** would require courts to order psychiatric or psychological testing to determine whether an animal cruelty offender is capable of providing humane care before issuing an order prohibiting the possession or ownership of a companion animal. The bills are in the Assembly and Senate Agriculture Committees.



**New York S 299 and A 390** would require offenders convicted of aggravated cruelty to animals to undergo psychiatric evaluation and appropriate treatment for mental illness. The bills are in the Senate and Assembly Agriculture Committees.



**Pennsylvania HB 530** would require persons convicted of animal cruelty to attend and complete violence prevention counseling. The bill is in the House Judiciary Committee.



**Tennessee SB 183 and HB 398**, recognizing that “cruelty to animals by a child often leads to further criminal activity, sometimes homicidal activity by the child as he or she ages,” would require juveniles who commit aggravated animal cruelty under certain circumstances to receive mental health evaluation and treatment. **SB 183** passed the Senate 33-0 and the House 92-0 and was **signed by the Governor on May 5**. It became effective July 1.



### *Court-Appointed Advocates for Animals*



**Minnesota SF 3324 and SF 3300** would allow courts to appoint an advocate to represent the interests of the animal from a list of attorneys who have been trained in this procedure and who would serve pro bono. The bills are in the Senate Judiciary & Public Safety and House Public Safety & Finance Committees **for the 2024 legislative session.**



**New Jersey A 1965/S 2211** would create a two-year pilot program to allow courts to appoint a pro bono attorney or law student special advocate to represent the best interests of, and justice for, animals in cruelty cases. It was reported out of the Assembly Judiciary Committee and is in the Senate Environment and Energy Committee.



**New York A 111 and S 1659** would create court-appointed attorney and law student advocates for animals in civil and criminal animal welfare cases, to represent the interests of the animal. The bill is in the Assembly Judiciary Committee.

### *Animal Abuse and Other Crimes*



**New Jersey A3841** would prohibit offenders convicted of animal cruelty from possessing a firearm or being issued a permit to purchase a handgun. The bill is in the Assembly Judiciary Committee.



**New York A 340** would include felony animal cruelty offenses among the crimes which would prohibit possession of a firearm. The bill is in the Assembly Codes Committee.



**New York A 1639** would require the district attorney in each county to appoint at least one assistant district attorney to be responsible for overseeing the prosecution of animal cruelty crimes. The bill is in the Assembly Local Governments Committee.



**New York A 1844** would move the state's anti-cruelty statutes from the Agriculture and Markets Law to the Penal Law. The bill is in the Assembly Codes Committee.



**New York S 96** would enact "Kirby & Quigley's Law" expanding the definition of aggravated cruelty to animals to include harm to a companion animal during the commission of a felony. The bill is in the Assembly Agriculture Committee.



**New York S 5337 and A 7303** would add animal fighting as a criminal act when referring to enterprise corruption. The bills are in the Senate and House Codes Committees.



**Oregon SB 5506** will appropriate \$457,758 for an animal cruelty resource prosecutor in the Department of Justice's Criminal Justice Division. Oregon already has a successful statewide animal cruelty prosecution program through the Division, but the position is grant-funded and it was unknown how long the grant funding will continue. **The provision was signed into law on Aug. 4.**



**Pennsylvania HB 642** would allocate \$2,000,000 per year to local law enforcement agencies to investigate and enforce violations of gambling and animal fighting laws. The bill is in the House Committee on Gaming Oversight.

## THE LINK... IN THE NEWS

### Man Convicted of Bestiality as Child Pornography Charges Dropped



**Timothy Blackmon**

A man who had pled guilty to distributing an “animal crush” video, and who had a federal charge of possessing child pornography dropped as part of a plea agreement, was sentenced to 46 months in prison with three years of supervised release.

Timothy Lewis Blackmon, 43, of Walkertown, N. Car., had been indicted in 2022 by a federal grand jury on the charges, which included attempting to sell a video of a man having sex with a dog. [CBS-17 TV](#) reported that Blackmon must also undergo substance abuse treatment and be barred from owning or caring for any pets or livestock. Forsyth County Sheriff’s deputies had charged Blackmon with 19 felony counts of “crime against nature” after receiving a tip that Blackmon was charging \$5 for a video of his pit bull having sex with a woman. The woman, Tracy Lynn Abbott,

was his co-defendant in those state charges and told investigators that she had cheated on Blackmon and he had made her perform a sexual act with the dog to make up for it. Abbott pleaded guilty to two counts of “crime against nature” and received a suspended sentence of 3-to-13 months in prison. The state charges against Blackmon were dropped when the federal indictments were issued. Two dogs were seized and placed with the Forsyth County Humane Society.

### Australian Charged with Killing Mother and Cat and Setting House on Fire

Police in Sydney, Australia tasered and arrested a man who confronted them with a knife after allegedly murdering his mother, killing the family’s pet cat and setting the house on fire. The Sydney [Morning Herald](#) reported that Tony Safranko, 31, had been released on bail the previous day for attacking and choking his mother. That bail was revoked and he was also charged with violating a protection order. Other media reports indicated his mother, Katherine Safranko, 67, suffered serious head injuries.

### Woman Charged with Distributing “Crush Videos” of Monkeys Being Tortured

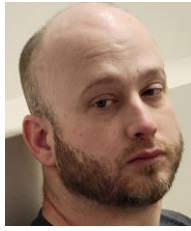
Nicole Devilbiss, 35, of Jacksonville, Fla., is facing federal charges of conspiring to produce and distribute “animal crush videos” for allegedly serving as an administrator of “Mister Ape,” an online group that would collect \$100 to \$230 per video from group members to pay for the production of monkey torture videos. According to court documents, Devilbiss said she commented on videos depicting animal crush videos and shared “dozens” of videos showing monkeys being tortured.

The [First Coast News](#) reported that the U.S. Department of Justice filed charges in U.S. District Court after Devilbiss reportedly admitted to being in multiple group chats “dedicated to the abuse and torture of monkeys,” although she allegedly stated her initial intentions of joining the group were to “help stop the torture of monkeys” but began to find relief from the videos. She faces a possible sentence of five years in federal prison. Devilbiss was previously arrested by the St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office in April 2023 on charges of felony larceny and misdemeanor charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor. “Crush videos” are depictions of animals being tortured for the viewers’ sexual gratification.



**Nicole Devilbiss**

## Alleged Burglar Charged with Attacking Ducklings with Staple Gun



**Tyler McMillan**

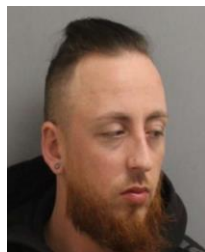
A Tulsa, Okla. man who had been arrested last April on charges of burglary, possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, and illegal possession of a firearm was arrested again in October for allegedly using a staple gun on two small ducklings and throwing them out of a moving car. [NewsOn6](#) reported that Tyler McMillan was charged with animal cruelty, unlawful disposal of a dead animal, and assault and battery of a police officer after allegedly throwing an e-cigarette at one of the officers making the arrest at his home. In April, Tulsa Police detectives searched McMillan's home after learning that he was a suspect in two neighborhood burglaries. [KTUL-TV](#) reported that police allegedly found stolen firearms and keys, 1-1/2 pounds of marijuana, and 18 grams of psilocybin mushrooms

## Fight Over Break-up Leads to Attack on Two Guinea Pigs

An Evansville, Ind. man who reportedly got into an argument with a woman after they broke up was arrested for allegedly taking her children's two guinea pigs outside and slamming them to the sidewalk, killing one and injuring the other. [WEVV-TV](#) reported that Nigell Johnson, 29, also hit the woman in the face and threatened to kill her. Johnson faces charges of animal cruelty, battery, intimidation, and criminal mischief.



**Nigell Johnson**



**Timothy Olschafskie**

## Cat Killer Suspected in Death of Child

A convicted Connecticut serial cat killer was arrested on a fugitive-from-justice charge after it was learned that the State of Delaware has a warrant for his arrest on suspicion of killing a child. Detectives arrested Timothy Edward Olschafskie, 30, of Enfield, Conn., at a fast-food restaurant where he worked and his bail was later set at \$1.5 million, according to the [Middletown Press](#). Delaware authorities plan to extradite him in the child homicide case. Olschafskie, who was charged with brutally killing seven cats and admitted killing five of them, was sentenced to two years in prison, followed by probation, in 2015. He was charged again in 2021 with harassment and violation of probation but received a suspended sentence.

## 20 Cats, Two Children Rescued from New Jersey Hoarding Situation

Monmouth County, N.J. SPCA officers rescued 20 cats from a bug-infested apartment in Neptune, N.J., where a family was described by the SPCA as "struggling" and where two children, aged 3 and 6, were frequently sent home from school due to poor hygiene. [Patch Media](#) reported that an anonymous tip led to the raid on the hoarding situation, where officers had to don full protective gear to transfer the cats and kittens to the animal shelter for medical evaluations. The children were referred to the Division of Child Protection & Permanency. "The Monmouth County SPCA was the first organization to assist this family, which will now trickle down to other entities to help the children and adults in the home," said SPCA Director Ross Licitra.

## Woman Charged with Beating Man with a 9-Week-Old Kitten

An unidentified woman in Kingston, Ontario was charged with animal cruelty and assault for allegedly beating a man several times with a 9-week-old kitten that subsequently died. [Global News Canada](#) reported that police said they responded to the domestic violence incident at 4 a.m. where the woman was arguing with a man, threatened him, beat him in the chest multiple times with the kitten, and then threw the kitten at him. The woman, aged 57, and the man were not identified out of Canadian protocols to protect the identity of victims.

## LINK TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

**NOTE: More and more trainings are being converted back into live rather than into virtual formats. Click on the underlined hyperlinks for more detailed information.**

**Jan. 16, 2024 – Kansas City, Mo. (online):** Besty BnB will host a [webinar](#), “Safety Planning with Survivors of Domestic Violence and their Pets.”

**Jan. 17, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**Jan. 18, 2024 –Phoenix, Ariz.:** A breakout session on “Skills: Identifying and Presenting Links between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse” will be featured at the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys’ [5<sup>th</sup> National Domestic Violence Prosecution Conference](#).

**Jan. 19, 2024 – Hartford, Conn.:** Phil Arkow and Diane Rosell will discuss The Link at the [University of Connecticut School of Law](#).

**Jan. 22-25, 2024 – San Diego, Calif.:** Barbara Boat will present on The Link at the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual San Diego [International Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment](#).

**Feb. 20, 2024 – Alexandria, Va. (online):** Phil Arkow will present “Connecting the Dots in Preventing Domestic Violence: Animal Abuse’s LINK with Family Violence in Military and Civilian Families” for the [National Organization for Victim Assistance](#).

**Feb. 21, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**Feb. 28, 2024 – Pittsburgh, Pa. (online):** Phil Arkow will present a webinar for Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) and the Crisis Center North.

**March 1, 2024 – Indianapolis, Ind. (online):** Phil Arkow will present “Nine Career Opportunities Where Pet-Inclusive Social Work Can Improve Delivery of Services” at the Indiana University School of Social Work’s [Alumni Conference](#).

**March 20, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**March 25, 2024 – Des Moines, Iowa:** Phil Arkow will present :”Connecting the Dots in Child Abuse and Children’s Advocacy: Animal Abuse as a Risk Factor for Child Maltreatment and Other Family Violence” for the [Blank Children’s Hospital’s STAR Center](#).



**March 28, 2024 (online):** Katie Campbell will present “The Power of Pets: How Pet-friendly Domestic Violence Shelters Aid Healing, Build Morale, and Support Fundraising,” in a [webinar](#) for the Justice Clearinghouse.

**April 17, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**April 23-25, 2024 – San Diego, Calif.:** Phil Arkow will be a keynote and workshop speaker at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual International Family Justice Center [Conference](#).

**April 24, 2024 – Pittsburgh, Pa. (online):** A webinar for Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) and the Crisis Center North will address The Link between animal abuse and child maltreatment.

**May 15, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**June 19, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**July 16, 2024 – (online):** Phil Arkow will present “The Missing LINK in Social Work: Addressing Animal Abuse to Improve Delivery of Services to Vulnerable Victims” in a webinar for the [Justice Clearinghouse](#).

**July 17, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**Aug. 21, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**Sept. 13-14, 2024 – Cleveland, Ohio:** The 8<sup>th</sup> [International Veterinary Social Work Summit](#) will be held.

**Sept. 18, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**Sept. 23, 2024 – Pittsburgh, Pa. (online):** A webinar for Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) and the Crisis Center North will address The Link between animal abuse and elder abuse.

**Oct. 16, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**Nov. 19, 2024 – (online):** Phil Arkow will present “Connecting the Dots in Military and Civilian Families: Animal Abuse’s Links to Other Family Violence” in a webinar for the [Justice Clearinghouse](#).

**Nov. 20, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.

**Dec. 18, 2024 (online):** Pennsylvania’s [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its monthly meeting.



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## ABOUT THE NATIONAL LINK COALITION



The National Link Coalition is the only international educational and advocacy organization working to prevent animal cruelty, domestic violence, child maltreatment, and elder abuse by showing how they intersect. As the international resource center on The Link between animal cruelty and human violence we train multi-disciplinary professionals, showcase programs, and publicize legislation and research to foster collaborations that create safer communities by recognizing that when animals are abused, people are at risk, and when people are abused, animals are at risk. I.R.S. 501c3 tax exemption no. 92-2607909

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