NATIONAL LINK COALITION
Working together to stop violence against people and animals

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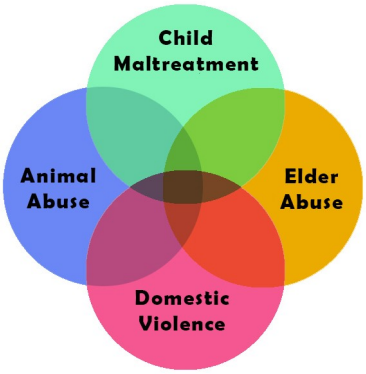

A monthly report of news from

THE GLOBAL RESOURCE CENTER ON THE LINK BETWEEN ANIMAL ABUSE AND HUMAN VIOLENCE

Top Stories in This Issue:

Link cited in call to bar children from trophy hunting *(Page 5)*

Florida may expand veterinary reporting of suspected cruelty *(Page 8)*

UK expanding Link & veterinary social work training *(Page 13)*

Our Year-End "Big Ask"

Thanks to the generosity of our *LINK-Letter* readers and three very generous philanthropic supporters, the National Link Coalition has been in a fortunate position in 2025 where we have not had to pester you with repetitive fundraising appeals. This has enabled us to devote more time and energy to our critical work. If you've been following our progress, you know how much we have accomplished, how much more we have to do — and how much we appreciate your support!

Please visit https://nationallinkcoalition.org/donate-to-the-national-link-coalition/accomplishments-this-year to see how your gifts have helped us publish **349 articles** in The LINK-Letter, conduct **128 trainings**, monitor 142 **legislative bills** and review **80 new academic references**, and so much more in 2025. In the holiday season of giving, we're asking you to consider including the National Link Coalition in your end-of-year charitable giving. Together, we can continue to make a lasting impact in the lives of vulnerable people and animals affected by crime and crisis.

Please visit our website at https://nationallinkcoalition.org/donate-to-the-national-link-coalition to make a safe and secure contribution. Your gift will help us make a significant difference. Thank you!

Inside this issue

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE… and THE LINK

Florida to Consider Coercive Animal Abuse as Domestic Violence

A bipartisan bill pre-filed in the Florida Legislature for consideration in the 2026 session would develop a statewide emergency communications plan to respond to domestic violence and dating violence incidents, with two provisions that would add animal cruelty to the statutory definition of domestic violence and grounds for issuing a protection-from-abuse order.

Reps. Debra Tendrich & Danny Nix, Jr.

HB 277, sponsored by Reps. Debra Tendrich (D – Palm Beach County) and Danny Nix, Jr. (R – Charlotte & Sarasota Counties) would create the "Domestic Emergency and Batterers Reform and Accountability Act." It would create a system whereby 911 calls reporting domestic or dating violence would get coordination among all emergency services, including law enforcement, firefighting, EMS, poison control, suicide prevention, and emergency management, with the flagged address remaining in the system for at least one year after the 911 call. Each county would integrate the system based on its resources and availability.

Emergency medical technicians, paramedics, firefighters, and volunteer firefighters would be required to take training classes on domestic violence, dating violence and strangulation for certification and recertification.

In addition to specifically naming animal cruelty within the definition of domestic violence, the bill addresses The Link in protection orders. Injunctions for protection against domestic violence, which since 2020 have allowed Florida courts to award petitioners exclusive care and control of pets and prohibit respondents from harming the animals, would now add specific language identifying the respondent's intentional injuring or killing a family pet, service animal or emotional support animal or using the animal as a means of coercive control as grounds for issuing a protection order.

Such coercive control or harm to animals would be specifically identified as factors for courts to determine whether a petitioner has reasonable cause to believe she or he is in imminent danger of becoming a victim of domestic violence.

Acts of aggravated animal cruelty would be sentence multipliers in courts' determination of sentencing options for convicted offenders.

Currently, acts or threats of animal cruelty intended to coerce a victim are defined as domestic or dating violence or stalking in Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Texas, Utah, Vermont, and Washington, plus the District of Columbia.

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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.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE… and THE LINK

Unique Turkish Divorce Settlement Includes Cat Support

Echoing a pattern emerging in the U.S., a court in Turkey has issued a unique order addressing the welfare of two cats in a couple's divorce settlement.

While Turkish law does not formally recognize pet alimony, the case has sparked national discussion about pet custody in divorce proceedings and may set a precedent for treating companion animals as family members rather than property.

In the case, a man has agreed to pay 10,000 Turkish liras (approximately US$236) every three months to support the care of two cats he shared with his ex-wife. The agreement, which transfers custody of the cats to the ex-wife, includes inflation-adjusted payments for up to 10 years as long as the cats remain with her.

Australian radio station 3BA reported that the man, identified only as Buğra B., will pay the funds to his ex-wife, Ezgi B. The couple, citing "severe incompatibility and a breakdown in the foundation of their marriage," opted for a mutually agreed-upon divorce without seeking alimony or compensation from each other. However, their divorce filing included a novel clause addressing the financial maintenance of their pets, marking a potential shift in how pet custody is handled in divorce proceedings.

The inclusion of "cat support" in the divorce agreement has sparked discussions in Turkey, with some calling it a "new type of alimony." The case could set a precedent for pet-owning couples navigating divorce, as pets are increasingly viewed as family members rather than property.

While Turkish law does not formally recognize pets as deserving of alimony-like support, the agreement highlights a growing awareness of the emotional and financial responsibilities tied to pet ownership post-divorce.

Since 2016, nine jurisdictions in North America (Alaska, California, District of Columbia, Illinois, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and the Canadian province of British Columbia) have begun to recognize similar issues with laws allowing courts to specifically award custody of pets in divorce settlements based upon the courts' determination of which party would be in the animals' best interests. Given that pets are often targeted and harmed during the rancor of domestic violence culminating in divorce, and that they can be targeted as well post-separation, rulings and laws such as these may play a significant part in protecting people and pets in domestic violence Link scenarios.

CHILD MALTREATMENT and THE LINK

Connecticut Webinar Reviews Cross-Reporting

"We need to be working together and keep the lines of communications open to keep all members of the community safe and healthy."

That was the advice from Kelli Baker, Chief State Animal Control Officer for Connecticut in a training webinar that brought the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Children & Families, and the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence together to review Connecticut's evolving Link programming and cross-reporting *(See the July 2011 LINK-Letter).*

Ninety-one registrants saw the National Link Coalition's Phil Arkow present *"Kids, Critters and Vulnerable Women: Connecting the Dots between Animal Abuse and Human Violence"*. The program explored Connecticut's progress since implementing mandatory cross-reporting between DCF caseworkers and animal control officers in 2011, and new ways to add Link-based questions to DCF's trainings, assessments, screenings, and case planning and management.

Questions about animal welfare are included in Intimate Partner Violence clinical teams' questionnaires. Animal cruelty and The Link are included in DCF staff training about mandated reporter responsibilities.

> ***"It's really just about keeping everybody safe." —Kelli Baker, Chief ACO***

"We're educating our social workers about the law that they are mandated to report suspected animal cruelty. It drives home the importance of The Link and the overlapping relationship between child safety and animal welfare," said Diane Rosell, Program Director for Transitional Supports and Success for DCF.

"When you're in a home you need to scan the entire environment and that includes the animals," she added. DCF social workers are advised to look for an animal that's bleeding or obvious signs of abuse. Emaciation is a clear sign an animal is being neglected. The presence or absence of animal food bowls, or how the people treat their animals during the caseworker's visit, can be a sign of how pets are being cared for.

"Because our social workers are so trained and vigilant about child abuse and neglect, it's not a far stretch for them to apply the same symptomatology about animals. We want them to report anything that doesn't feel right," Rosell added.

Rosell echoed an issue that has been reported among child protection caseworkers in other states: the social workers are so afraid of animals themselves they often ask that animals be locked away in another room during a home visit, which deprives the caseworker from fully understanding any human-animal welfare issues that might exist. DCF is working on a practice guidance and training programs to teach staff about animal behavior and how to keep themselves safe. "We're calling it the 'Don't Get Bit ' class," joked Baker.

DCF is working on systematizing the recognition and reporting of suspected animal abuse. It's one thing to get staff to ask questions about whether clients' animals are being cared for, but staff need to be cued in advance as to why such questions are important , Rosell said.

Meanwhile, each year 30 to 35 new animal control officers receive 80 hours of training which includes how to recognize and report suspected child abuse. "From Day 1 this is ingrained in them that this is part of their reporting process," Baker emphasized. Animal control training academies also include Baker and Rosell explaining what to look for and how to report.

The cross-reporting mechanisms are working. In the first nine months of 2025, 179 reports were received; DCF reported 94 cases to animal control, 82 animal control officers made reports to DCF, and two reports came in from the general public.

"We're all working for the greater good of every living being in that home," Baker concluded. "It's really just about keeping everybody safe."

CONNECTICUT CROSS-REPORTING (Jan.-Sept. 2025)

DCF reports of suspected animal abuse to ACOs:	**94**
ACO reports of suspected child abuse to DCF:	**82**
Reports from general public:	**2**
TOTAL:	**179**

CHILD MALTREATMENT… and THE LINK

Link Cited in Call to Bar Children from Trophy Hunts

Trophy animal hunting across the African continent has long been a big commercial enterprise, but its emotional impact on children who participate in these hunts is less understood. The United Nations' Committee on the Rights of the Child, which in 2023 declared that children should have a right to be protected from animal cruelty and domestic violence *(See the October 2023 LINK-Letter)*, has been asked to expand this declaration to include trophy hunting.

South Africa's Humane Education Trust is reporting in its November 2025 issue of *Animal Voice* that on Feb. 8, 2024, at the UN's 95th Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Vice-Chair Rinchen Chophel urged the South African delegation to criminalize the practice of allowing children to participate in trophy hunting.

Rinchen Chophel

The Committee, Chophel said, "has made a significant breakthrough. Various psychological studies on violence and animal abuse have shown that witnessing or participating in violence can severely impact children's moral and psychological development, normalizing violence and conditioning lifelong negative behavioral patterns. The popular and societal acceptance and practice of child participation in animal trophy hunting is horrendous to say the least."

Chophel has served as the Royal Government of Bhutan's Executive Director of the National Commission for Women and Children and as Director General of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children. He was elected in 2020 to serve on the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child, a body of 18 international experts that monitors the involvement of children in armed conflicts, the sale of children, child pornography, and child prostitution.

Animal Voice also reported that in response to the UN Committee's 2023 declaration, Morocco is considering a change to its anti-cruelty laws to prohibit stray dogs from being shot in the streets. Draft Law 19.25, now under Parliamentary review, would impose mandatory prison sentences and/or fines for anyone who intentionally kills, tortures or injures a stray animal in any manner. However, other provisions of the draft, such as imposing fines on individuals who feed or care for stray animals, have drawn the wrath of animal welfare activists.

The Moroccan proposal reportedly came with strong input from FIFA, the world's soccer organization. Morocco is slated to co-host the World Cup in 2030, along with Spain and Portugal. FIFA regulations state that any candidate nation wishing to stage a FIFA even must be compliant with international human rights laws. The UN statement brings animal welfare into the human rights domain through the Rights of the Child.

Illinois Medical College Learns About The Link

The National Link Coalition's Phil Arkow (far left) was a featured speaker at the University of Illinois – Rockford College of Medicine MERIT (Medical Evaluation Response Initiative Team) training. 141 participants representing over 60 northern Illinois organizations working in child welfare attended MERIT's 2nd symposium. The event, "Protecting innocence: Uncovering Hidden Harms/Strengthening Our Response" attracted physicians, mental health clinicians, law enforcement, educators, social workers, counselors marriage and family therapists, psychologists, nurses, and medical students and faculty. Arkow presented "A One Health Look at Animal Abuse and Human Violence: Creating Safer Communities through Species-Spanning Prevention and Intervention".

THE COURTS… and THE LINK

New Rules of Evidence Recommended for Defendants with Prior Histories of Animal Cruelty

If an individual with a history of animal cruelty is charged with committing a violent act against a person, can a prosecutor offer evidence of that prior act to assert that the defendant has a violent character and therefore must have been violent at the time of the second crime?

That's a question explored in depth by attorney Yara Khalil in the latest issue of the Michigan State University Law School's Law Review. Khalil thoroughly reviews extensive case law, law journal articles and psychiatric studies in which violence and organized crime affiliation have a strong and predictable nexus with individuals who commit abusive acts against animals. But such Link evidence may or may not be admissible in a civil or criminal trial.

If an individual is charged with any sort of criminal or civil violent misdemeanor or felony, even including animal abuse, evidence that the individual has abused animals in the past is categorized as "propensity evidence" and typically is not admissible to prove the accused acted in accordance with that trait of violence, Khalil writes.

Khalil proposes that character evidence of a defendant's propensity to commit animal abuse should typically be admissible against defendants in state and federal courts, in all criminal and civil cases involving allegations of acts of violence, whether between domestic parties or unrelated parties, through the enactment of a new Federal Rule of Evidence, as well as through new state statutes in all fifty states.

FEDERAL RULES OF EVIDENCE

The Federal Rule of Evidence 404 generally prohibits attorneys from offering "propensity evidence" of an individual's character to prove the individual "acted in accordance with that trait at a particular time" because the risk such evidence might unfairly prejudice a jury. However, Federal Rule of Evidence 403 allows the introduction of relevant "probative" evidence that has a proper evidentiary purpose and is not deemed to be prejudicial. Trial judges can discern between slightly probative and highly problematic evidence, as well as everything in between, Khalil explains. Meanwhile, there are circumstances in which propensity evidence is admissible to aid prosecutors and plaintiffs' attorneys.

For example, prior acts of animal abuse may be introduced in cases of domestic violence, but not in other crimes, she writes. "This reality creates a large gap in the law that prohibits adults and children who are victims of violent crimes or torts from achieving justice through successful trials; allowing animal abuse propensity evidence concerning past violent acts committed by the defendant only in domestic violence cases makes it more difficult for prosecutors to prove other categories of violent crime, sometimes in situations where the result boils down to a contest of the defendant's word against that of the victim's.

Khalil concludes that not all crimes against humans and the inherent character in committing them warrant a liberal presumption of admissibility of animal cruelty histories in trial courts. "Just like sexual assault and child molestation, acts of animal abuse are extremely odious and unusual, and they are not committed by the average person in the United States population. Therefore, they can be highly probative of an individual's character, especially when observed in relation to charged and future criminal or tortious conduct.

Tara Khalil

"In light of the strong link between other violent crimes and animal abuse that occur outside of domestic relationships, there is a compelling need for animal abuse propensity evidence to have a strong presumption of admissibility in all violent criminal and civil cases," she adds.

"Evidence of this sort can be extremely helpful in securing justice for victims of abuse and assault, human and nonhuman, and lead to more comprehensive trial outcomes and subsequent justice."

-- Khalil, Y. J. (2025). Animal abuse propensity evidence should have presumptive admissibility against defendants for violent acts. *Animal & Natural Resource Law Review, 21,* 51-72.

VETERINARY MEDICINE… and THE LINK

AVMA, ABA Educate Veterinarians on Responding to Domestic Violence

The American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Bar Association have collaborated on a webinar and a livestreamed Q&A that offer AVMA members practical guidance on identifying signs of domestic violence and animal abuse or neglect and understanding the Link between them as a way to better protect people and pets.

The webinar, *"Domestic Violence: Protecting People and Pets",* was the result of research that shows that domestic violence abusers often use companion animals as tools of coercion and control, creating additional barriers for survivors seeking safety. In February 2025, the American Bar Association (ABA) adopted Resolution 504, recognizing the critical need to help protect the companion animals of domestic violence survivors *(See the February 2025 LINK-Letter).* Among other provisions, the Resolution emphasizes training for legal professionals, veterinarians, and other stakeholders on recognizing the Link between domestic violence and animal cruelty, supporting domestic violence victims, providing appropriate referrals, and maintaining confidentiality. The Resolution urges all levels of government "to enact legislation and/or support judicial processes that protect individuals by protecting their pets in family law and civil restraining order proceedings."

The Oct. 22 webinar was co-hosted by Megan Senatori, Executive Director of the Center of Animal Law Studies at Lewis & Clark Law School, and Kendall Houlihan, Associate Director in AVMA's Animal Welfare Division. The presenters were: Maricarmen Garza, Chief Counsel for the ABA's Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence; Amanda Bisol, a veterinarian and attorney from Maine serving on AVMA's Board of Directors; and Bethanie Poe, Associate Director of Education and Training at the University of Tennessee's Center for Veterinary Social Work.

The webinar offered information on how to access resources to support survivor decision-making and foster cross-disciplinary collaboration to help protect both survivors and their pets. It helped participants understand the veterinary team's role in reporting suspected animal cruelty and in supporting a coordinated response to family violence.

Clockwise, from top left: Megan Senatori, Kendall Houlihan, Maricarmen Garza, Amanda Bisol, and Bethanie Poe.

Bisol emphasized the importance of being aware of how domestic violence and animal maltreatment can be interconnected. Sometimes, she said, veterinarians may be the only ones to see the potential signs of an issue in a home. She also urged documenting a suspicious case with additional detail, including pictures, as such veterinary records may be valuable evidence if the case is investigated.

She noted common "red flags" that should make practitioners suspicious of possible animal abuse, the biggest one being an inconsistent medical history. Another sign that is not as common are multiple injuries on the same animal that are different ages—for example, if an X-ray of a new fracture shows a healing fracture.

The webinar was developed in collaboration with the American Bar Association's Companion Animal Law Subcommittee of the Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section's Animal Committee, the ABA's Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence, and the AVMA.

"The aim of this collaboration is to highlight the roles and responsibilities of different professionals and how we may more effectively interact with and support each other and our communities," said Houlihan, who also serves on the National Link Coalition's Professional Advisory Committee.

The livestreamed Q&A is available on demand on AVMA Axon for free and one continuing education credit. The AVMA and ABA co-hosted these sessions in recognition of October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

VETERINARY MEDICINE… and THE LINK

Florida to Consider Expanding Reporting of Suspected Animal Cruelty

While Florida's veterinarians since 2010 have been permitted to report suspected animal cruelty to local law enforcement and certified animal control officers, with immunity from liability for making such reports in good faith, a bill prefiled for introduction in the 2026 legislative session would greatly expand those provisions and make such reporting mandatory.

Florida law already requires veterinarians to report suspected criminal violations but does not explicitly include cases of animal cruelty. **SB 468,** sponsored by Sen. Tom A. Wright (R – Volusia/Brevard Counties), would include animal cruelty within that mandate and also expand reporting requirements to veterinary technicians and other employees if the animal is a past or current patient of the practice. Reports made in good faith would exempt the reporter from criminal and civil liability, professional disciplinary action and employer retaliation.

Sen. Tom Wright

Medical records regarding the case could be furnished to law enforcement and animal control authorities without fear of violating patient/client confidentiality. If a suspected violation occurs at a commercial food-producing animal operation on agricultural land, the veterinarian would have to provide notice to the client before making the report and would need a court order to release written medical records.

Knowingly altering or destroying medical records for the purpose of attempting to conceal animal cruelty, would be punishable as a misdemeanor. Failure to report suspected animal cruelty to proper authorities would subject the veterinarian to disciplinary action.

If enacted, the measure would take effect July 1, 2026.

Discount Available for Victim to Verdict Online Course

The Oregon State University/Victim to Verdict team is offering a special sale on its online course, *The Veterinary Team's Role in Animal Cruelty Cases.* The course highlights animal abuse's demonstrated Links to domestic violence and child abuse and how the response to animal maltreatment involves more than the welfare of the animal victim.

Through Dec. 15, you can enroll in the course for only $69. Use the Promo code **VICTIM100** to take advantage of the discount price.

Led by Kris Otteman, Emily Lewis and Linda Fielder, the course covers animal cruelty investigations, veterinary forensics, and the importance of veterinary response.

ANIMAL SEXUAL ABUSE… and THE LINK

Canadian "Crush" Case Couple Plead Guilty

The Winnipeg, Manitoba couple arrested for making and selling "crush" videos of animals being tortured and killed *(See the January 2025 LINK-Letter)* have each pled guilty to six counts of animal cruelty. Canada's CBC reported that Irene Lima, 56, and Chad Kabecz, 41, were in a 100-member Telegram "Goddess May Barefoot Premium Crush" group, with a price list for animals that could be stomped and killed, ranging from a baby mouse for $4 to a three-kitten family for $180. Lima would crush the animals under her bare feet, while Kabecz filmed videos which prosecutors said had sexual components.

Prosecutors found videos of more than 97 animals being tortured and killed, including more than 60 cats and kittens, seven birds, six rabbits, six hamsters, three goldfish, a frog and an axolotl.

Irene Lima and Chad Kabecz

PayPal records showed the couple made a profit of about $2,800. Lima's diary contained entries describing how much Lima loved killing things with her feet and the pleasure it brought her.

Police also alleged the couple had discussed plans to torture a child.

The couple has been in custody since their arrests in October 2024. A sentencing date has not yet been set.

THE LINK in the Literature

Canine-Assisted Interventions Found to Offer Mixed Results

Animal-assisted interventions in juvenile detention centers and programs for at-risk youths, such as training programs for dogs whose behavioral issues would be cause for them to be euthanized, have long been implemented as a strategy to improve compassion and empathy for animals, teamwork, and to generate a sense of self-confidence and achievement among youths who have not seen many successes in their lives. A recent scoping review of programs that address these holistic approaches that combat the complex risk factors for youth offending found mixed results in these programs' ability to improve incarcerated youths' social reintegration.

The reviewers, based at the University of Saskatchewan, found that some studies reported improved participant behavioral, psychological and social outcomes, while a few reported no significant differences and even a worsening of symptoms. The authors called for more standardized terminology and protocols, enhanced training for animal handlers, and more rigorous program evaluation to make these potentially promising interventions more ethical and effective.

- Roma, R., Dadgardoust, L., Doi, C., Dell, C.A., & Mousavian, G. (2025, Nov. 6). A review of canine-assisted interventions for youth involved in the criminal justice system. *Social Sciences 14:* 651. https://doi.org/ 10.3390/socsci14110651

Italian Protocol Offers Multidisciplinary Responses to Animal Hoarding

Animal hoarding is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon that poses serious risks to animal welfare, public health, environmental balance, and Links with abuse of elders and children. A new research study from Italian health authority and veterinary institutions is emphasizing that despite increasing attention, current interventions often remain fragmented and lack integration across medical, psychological, and social domains.

Based on a critical review of existing tools and field experience in the Italian context, the study proposes a structured operational protocol to support multidisciplinary teams in the assessment and management of animal hoarding cases. The protocol integrates three complementary tools:

- A preliminary observational form;
- A clinical-relational interview;
- A veterinary health form.

Designed to be modular, replicable, and shareable among professionals from diverse backgrounds, the protocol aims to promote a One Welfare approach, recognizing the systemic interconnection between animal suffering, human psychological distress, and environmental degradation.

While the authors acknowledge that further experimental validation is required, the conceptual model provides a concrete operational basis for structured interventions and consistent data collection in support of research and public health.

- Bellini, F., Cal, A., Liverini, A., Regoli, G., & Ruffo, G. (2025). Development of an operational protocol for animal hoarding: A conceptual proposal based on multidisciplinary field experience. *Animals 15*(21), 3222. https://doi.org/10.3390/ani15213222

HELP US KEEP THE LINK FREE!

We at the National Link Coalition believe that information is power, and that power shouldn't be available only to those who can afford to pay. That's why we keep The LINK-Letter and the fabulous resources at NationalLinkCoalition.org free of charge.

Thousands of people around the U.S. and world rely on our high-quality information to keep up-to-date on new developments in this rapidly-evolving, dynamic field.

Please support our mission and help keep The Link free for all by making a tax-deductible contribution to the National Link Coalition today.

The LINK in THE LITERATURE

Link Issues Raised in Turkish Veterinary Pathology Textbook

A new veterinary forensics textbook published in Turkey makes reference to several Link-related issues in its emphasis on the "crucial role" that the emerging field of veterinary forensic pathology plays in conducting and reporting postmortem examinations in forensic cases involving animals. The textbook describes animal hoarding as a more complex variation of animal neglect that, while often described as a rescue and aid effort by those who commit this act, is considered a symptom of complex neuropsychiatric disorders. The book also details techniques for investigating cockfights and collecting evidence in these crimes which are often Linked with crimes against humans.

- Filoğlu, G., & Bülbül, Ö. (2024). *Adli Biyoloji: Doğanın İzleriyle Adaletin Peşinde I [Forensic Biology: Pursuing Justice with Nature's Traces]*[in Turkish]. Istanbul Universities Press.

Bestiality Extremely Common in Extreme Pornography Cases

A British study about what types of pornography were the focus of police investigations and whether charges were brought in conjunction with other types of offending reported that between 2009-2014, of 405 defendants who had been convicted for possession of extreme pornography, 86% related to images of bestiality. A subsequent study of 591 defendants investigated for extreme pornography found that the vast majority – 87% -- related to bestiality images.

"Extreme" pornography was defined as including: intercourse or oral sex with an animal (87% of cases); acts resulting in serious sexual injury (6%); acts threatening a person's life (5%); non-consensual penetration (1%); and sexual abuse of a human corpse (1%). The study also detailed the ages and ethnicities of perpetrators and co-occurrence of other crimes.

- McGlynn, C., & Bows, H. (2019). Possessing extreme pornography: Policing, prosecutions and the need for reform. *The Journal of Criminal Law, 83*(6), 473-488. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022018319877778

Join Us In Our Mission!

Please help us educate and advocate to promote greater legislative, public and professional understanding of, and response to, The Link between animal abuse and other family and community violence! 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.

Therapists Encouraged to Ask Patients About Their Pets

Pet-related discussions can help clients feel more comfortable addressing sensitive topics such as domestic violence. In these situations, they may start describing violence against their pets before feeling comfortable talking about violence against themselves. Being attentive and open when these themes emerge can open the door for clinically relevant conversations."

That was the advice from Renata Roma, Ph.D., a clinician and researcher specializing in human-animal interactions in a May 13 *Psychology Today blog* encouraging therapists to discuss clients' relationships with their pets to gain better insights, reveal emotional dynamics and enhance therapy.

> ***"They may start describing violence against their pets before feeling comfortable talking about violence against themselves." — Renata Roma***

Because over 90% of people consider their pets part of the family and, at times,

Renata Roma

silent witnesses to life's most challenging and best moments, pets are a meaningful source of emotional support for children and adults. These relationships often reflect people's emotional needs and relational patterns, she writes.

Some individuals report feeling more empathy for animals than for people, and others – especially younger generations -- may even feel more emotionally connected to their companion animals than to close relatives.

Roma cites three reasons why therapists should no longer overlook the impact of companion animals on people's emotional lives:

Validation of Emotional Bonds: When clinicians open space to pet- related conversations, they may help clients feel validated. Directly asking, "Do you have a pet at home?" or showing curiosity when the topic spontaneously emerges in conversation, are simple ways to start.

Building Therapeutic Trust: People tend to be more at ease when asked about the companion animals in their lives, which can mitigate anxiety and strengthen the therapeutic alliance.

Gaining Clinical Insights: Understanding the complex interactions of pets and people, which can range from emotional and social support to pet loss and grief, can help clinicians identify potential target areas for therapy and offer key information about clients' social support systems and ways to relate to others.

"Considering the evolving role of companion animals in families, why not include pet-related questions?" she concludes.

Building GLOBAL LINK AWARENESS

Link Cited in Campaign to Strengthen India's Anti-Cruelty Laws

As we've reported in several previous issues of The LINK-Letter *(See the October 2025, May 2025, December 2023, July-August 2022, and June 2016 issues),* recognition of how animal cruelty is also a human welfare issue is helping animal welfare leaders in India raise awareness and press for more stringent and effective anti-cruelty laws. The most recent example of this outreach took place in Delhi in November, when Dr. O.P. Chaudhary addressed PETA India's first educational and capacity-building workshop held in the capital city of Delhi.

Chaudhary, a retired Indian Forest Service officer, former Joint Secretary for the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, and former chairperson of the Animal Welfare Board of India, addressed over 200 participants.

"'Combating cruelty to animals is crucial to ensure a safer society for all, as people who harm animals often hurt more animals and humans," Chaudhary said.

Link Featured at New Jersey Human-Animal Bond Conference

The National Link Coalition's Phil Arkow was invited to present a Link program on "The 'Dark Side' of the Human-Animal Bond" at the annual Soothing Paws Conference held for animal-assisted therapy volunteers and medical staff at Morristown, N.J. Medical Center. The all-day conference also featured: Nancy Gee, Director of the Center for Human-Animal Interaction at Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Medicine; Ann Howie, Founder of Human-Animal Solutions; Karen Leies, President & CEO of The Seeing Eye; and demonstrations of TSA explosives detecting K-9s.

UConn Law School Conference Offers Multiple Perspectives on The Link

Forensic veterinarian Martha Smith-Blackmore, who serves on our Professional Advisory Committee, was one of many presenters and panelists addressing The Link at the University of Connecticut School of Law's conference on multidisciplinary perspectives on animal cruelty investigations and Criminal Liability. Martha discussed Animal Hoarding to an audience of attorneys, prosecutors, public defenders, animal control officers, judges, and law school students.

UK Advancing Link and Veterinary Social Work Training and Research

Expansion of Link action throughout the United Kingdom, including veterinary reporting of suspected abuse and the creation of that nation's first Veterinary Social Work position, is continuing rapidly through the conducting of training programs and research studies.

Rebecca Stephens, co-director of education for the International Association of Veterinary Social Work, has been working with The Links Group UK. She reports that four recent trainings have brought together veterinary, animal welfare, and human service professionals to strengthen safeguarding practice across these sectors. The first training was hosted by Langford Vets, the clinical teaching platform for the University of Bristol Veterinary School.

The second training in Jersey, the British Channel Island Crown Dependency, was commissioned by the Government of Jersey in response to Recommendation 47 of the independent Jersey Violence Against Women and Girls Taskforce report, which called for regular training for veterinary professionals in the island *(See the August 2025 LINK-Letter).* The training was developed in collaboration with government officers and The Links Group, with support from Jersey's Chief Veterinary Officer, colleagues from the Animal Health and Welfare Team, Jersey SPCA and other key human service professional stakeholders.

Meanwhile, a presentation by The Links Group's Strategic Delivery Lead, Andrea Lynch, to the

Rebecca Stephens

National Organization for the Treatment of Abuse in Belfast, Northern Ireland resulted in a session by Mark Randell from Naturewatch Foundation to an interdisciplinary team at the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse.

The training sessions provided focused education on the historical context of The Link, responsibilities under animal welfare legislation, identifying non-accidental injury, clinical forensics, how animals are used as a strategy of coercive control in domestic abuse, the campaign for legislative change, and information about The Links Group's accredited specialist animal fostering services.

A new component of the training was the introduction of Veterinary Social Work. Stephens reports that participants responded positively to the idea of adopting a similar model in the UK and Jersey, recognizing the benefits of a new approach to promoting the well-being and safety of patients, clients and veterinary and animal welfare teams. "This training marked a significant step forward in developing integrated safeguarding approaches in the UK and Jersey to protect animals, children and adults."

Future plans include trainings in Belfast, Northern Ireland, to Volunteers Now and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Domestic Abuse Conference.

Stephens is also working with Langford Vets to conduct research to identify how clinical and non-clinical veterinary staff manage ethically complex and emotionally challenging situations, and how they could be supported to promote the well-being and safety of people and their pets. The findings of this research are expected to inform the creation of the UK's first veterinary social work position.

Stephens is also conducting a study with social work program leaders exploring the integration of the human-animal bond in social work education in the UK. Preliminary results show that although most programs do not cover this topic, course leaders are willing to include it, with nearly all agreeing that The Link between the abuse of animals and people is the most relevant topic to include.

Links Group UK Reports Ongoing Progress

Our colleagues at The Links Group UK are reporting that the past several months have been an extremely active period for conducting trainings, raising awareness, and considering potential legislation addressing ways to protect both people and animals across "the pond."

RAISING AWARENESS

Vicki Betton

Vice Chair Vicki Betton conducted an 18-minute *Practice Matters* podcast for the Federation of Independent Veterinary Practices. She alerted veterinarians that because abuse in any form is something they don't often like to think of, let alone talk about, especially in a caring professional capacity, even just acknowledging that an animal's injury may be deliberate can be incredibly challenging. She presented evidence that animals can also be abused in households where people are being abused.

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Nov. 25, marked the start of "16 Days of Activism", a collaborative international effort to raise awareness of the issue and the charities that provide lifesaving services. Activities included a Dec. 2 webinar, *Understanding Pet Abuse in Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control,* with a focus on Scotland.

Mary Wakeham

Trustee Mary Wakeham recorded a webinar on *What Is Domestic Abuse?* with Jill Caldwell, CEO at Endeavour Project, a community domestic abuse service. They discussed the scale, types, and myths about domestic abuse in the UK and how to respond. The webinar is the latest in a series that includes *Support for People and Pets, Animal Abuse as a Strategy of Coercive Control*, and *The Link and its Relevance in Social Work and Social Care.*

UK social workers are continuing to understand that their clients' human-animal bonds can illuminate their work. Trustee Rebecca Stephens teamed up with Mary Rauktis from the U.S. in an article, "Pets can give us clues about what's really going on behind closed doors", in the British Association of Social Workers' *Professional Social Work Magazine.*

The campaign for Protecting Animals, Protecting People in Northern Ireland is creating resources for Department of Health social workers, speaking about pet fostering at the Department for Communities, discussing multidisciplinary programs at the Causeway Coast Dog Rescue's annual conference, and meeting with the Minister for Justice and the DAERA Minister about tackling violence against women and girls.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

Programs in veterinary schools are continuing to train students to recognize and act on The Link. Programs were presented last summer at the Universities of Liverpool, Glasgow and Nottingham. Plans are under way to visit the University of Lancashire in 2026 to speak to their first cohort of undergraduates.

With ongoing support from the British Small Animal Veterinary Association, the group has completed the first two of the second series of Links Veterinary Training days in Yorkshire and East Midlands. Over the next three years there are plans to visit all 12 BSAVA regions across the UK delivering training to veterinary teams.

Paula Boyden

Paula Boyden described to the National Association of Veterinary Physiotherapists' Conference how they can identify Link issues in the animals' home environments. Emily Mills told the British Veterinary Receptionist Association Congress about the unique role that receptionists can play in recognizing and acting on abuse of animals and people.

LEGISLATION

Trustee David Martin and Chair Paula Boyden have been working with the Animal Related Crime Working Group, who are leading proposals on legislative change to help protect children and animals from sexual abuse. They cite evidence from the UK and the US that animal sexual abuse is closely linked with other serious forms of abuse, including child sexual exploitation, domestic violence, and coercive control. Proposed amendments to the Crime and Policing Bill addressing animal and child sexual abuse are under consideration in the House of Lords.

LEGISLATION… and THE LINK

While most state legislatures have adjourned for the year, we're still following 142 bills that were introduced this session, or prefiled for 2026,in state legislatures and Congress. The bills are color-coded as follows:

Purple bills affect domestic violence and pet protection orders
Dark blue bills affect child abuse and maltreatment
Grey bills affect abuse of the elderly and disabled
Pink bills affect animal sexual abuse
Green bills affect cross-reporting among animal care & control, veterinary and human services processionals
Orange bills affect court-appointed advocates for animals
Red bills affect animal hoarding
Brown bills affect psychological assessments, interventions and treatments for animal cruelty offenders
Light blue bills affect animal abuse Linked with other crimes

Please join us in following their progress and alert us to any additional bills we may have missed!

Note: Inclusion of a bill does not necessarily imply our endorsement of the measure or its specific language, but is included to demonstrate the breadth of proposals and the increased interest by legislators for laws addressing The Link between animal abuse and other crimes and acts of interpersonal violence.

USA—FEDERAL BILLS

H.R. 712, the Child and Animal Abuse Detection and Reporting Act, would direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to include data on animal abuse in the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) clearinghouse for information relating to child abuse and neglect.

H.R. 1477, the Animal Cruelty Enforcement (ACE) Act, would establish an Animal Cruelty Crimes Section within the U.S. Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division.

H.R. 3683, the FBI Animal Cruelty Taskforce Act, would establish an animal cruelty crimes taskforce within the FBI to investigate and enforce federal laws, including cases of dogfighting, cockfighting, and crush videos.

H.R. 3946, the Fighting Inhumane Gambling and High-risk Trafficking (FIGHT) Act would make it illegal to engage a minor under age 16 in animal fighting ventures, including cockfighting.

H.R. 4921, the Providing for Unhoused People and Pets (PUPP) Act, would authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to make grants to modify and upgrade structures to serve as interim and permanent housing to accommodate unhoused individuals with pets

ALASKA

HB 101 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have allowed judges to consider a history of animal cruelty as an aggravating factor in imposing a sentence outside the sentencing guidelines for domestic violence or distributing material depicting bestiality to a minor under age 18..

ARIZONA

HB 2211 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have allowed petitioners to file for a "severe threat order of protection" to prevent a respondent who has threatened or committed injury, death or cruel mistreatment of an animal from possessing a firearm.

HB 2530 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have clarified that persons who are experiencing homelessness, such as domestic violence victims, are permitted to bring service animals into homeless shelters.

SB 1038 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have defined aggravated assault to include assault on an animal control officer.

SB 1412 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have expanded the definition of "domestic violence", which includes cruelty, neglect or abandonment, to also include illegally killing a domestic animal.

CALIFORNIA

SUCCESS!!! **AB 561** allows domestic violence and elder abuse survivors to file for protection orders — which can include protection of animals — electronically and to appear remotely at hearings.

SUCCESS!!! **SB 221** expands the definition of stalking to include willfully, maliciously, and repeatedly following or harassing another person and who makes a credible threat to place that person in reasonable fear for the safety of that person's pet, service animal, emotional support animal, or horse.

FLORIDA

SUCCESS!!! **CS/HB 255, and CS/SB 494 "Dexter's Law", were enacted on May 29.** They provide harsher penalties for aggravated animal cruelty cases because the bill's sponsor wrote, "Individuals who commit these heinous acts typically don't stop at animals; they are better indicators of future violence, harassment, assault, rape, murder, and arson cases as found by the FBI. Animal abuse is a strong predictor of potential aggravated violence towards humans and animal abuse can serve as an early warning sign for family violence." It takes effect Jan. 1, 2026.

SB 468 *(pre-filed for 2026)* would require veterinarians, technicians and other employees to report suspected animal cruelty with exemption from criminal and civil liability, professional disciplinary action and employer retaliation for making reports in good faith. Medical records could be released without violating confidentiality. Altering medical records would be a misdemeanor; failure to report would subject the veterinarian to disciplinary action.

HB 277 *(pre-filed for 2026)* would add animal cruelty to the statutory definition of domestic violence and add a respondent's intentional injuring or killing a family pet, service animal or emotional support animal or using the animal as a means of coercive control as grounds for issuing a protection order.

GEORGIA

SUCCESS!!! **HB 177 was signed into law on May 13 and took effect July 1.** It allows courts to issue protection orders that include "the care, custody and control of any animal owned, possessed, kept, or held as a household pet by either party or by a minor child living in the household or residence of either party." Court orders can also prevent the respondent from harassing, harming, taking, transferring, encumbering, or concealing pets and committing animal cruelty.

SB 102 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have made it a crime to bring a minor under age 18 to a dog– or cock-fight.

HAWAI'I

HB 698 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have increased the criminal penalties for animal cruelty resulting in an animal's death, dog fighting, causing the death of a service or law enforcement animal, sexual assault of an animal, and subjecting a minor to sexual contact with an animal. The bill was based on the recognition that: "animal cruelty offenders are a threat to the health and safety of all members of our communities, especially vulnerable populations"; that "animal cruelty is a predictive and co-occurring crime with violence against humans, including children, intimate partners, and the elderly"; and that "children who witness animal abuse are also more likely to abuse animals as teenagers and adults."

SB 460 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have recognized that children living in a home where domestic violence and threats of animal cruelty occur are victimized even if they have not been physically harmed, and would have given them standing to file for a protection order or a temporary restraining order.

IDAHO

SUCCESS!!! **HB 380 was signed into law on March 26.** It creates two new crimes of Aggravated Lewd Conduct with a Minor Child, including bestiality. Penalties for offenders are mandatory 25 years-to-life if the victim is aged 13-16, and life imprisonment or the death penalty if the child us aged 12 or younger.

ILLINOIS

HB 72 would amend the Code of Criminal Procedure to provide that a person with three or more pending charges for domestic battery, battery, violation of a protection order, criminal damage to household property, or felony animal cruelty that poses a real and present threat to the safety of any person or the community, may be classified as a habitual misdemeanant offender.

HB 1903 would create the Human Trafficking Order of Protection Act that would include allowing courts to order respondents to stay away from, taking, harming, or disposing of any animal harmed by the petitioner.

HB 3367 would allow courts to appoint attorneys or law students to serve as special advocates in the interests of justice in any criminal case involving a dog or cat.

IOWA

HF 227 and HF 869 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have given veterinarians immunity from administrative, civil, or criminal liability or disciplinary action, and not subject to confidentiality requirements, for acting in good faith and reporting to or cooperating with any peace officer investigating animal mistreatment, animal fighting or bestiality. Making a false report would have been a misdemeanor subject to disciplinary action and civil liability.

KENTUCKY

HB 96 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have defined "coercive control" to include intimidation forcing the other person to relinquish domestic animals; communicating the intent to harm the other person's domestic animals, including by use of physical violence; and causing isolation of the other person from domestic animals.

HB 330 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have required individuals who are subjects of a domestic violence protection order — which may include courts granting possession of the couple's animals — to surrender any firearms. Protection orders would have been required to include language notifying the respondent about the firearms prohibition.

HB 194 ("Kyan's Law") died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have required animal control officers to receive training on recognizing child abuse and would have added animal control officers to the list of people with a duty to report dependency, neglect or abuse of a child.

LOUISIANA

SUCCESS!!! **S.B. 21** expands the definitions of "healthcare professional" and "healthcare facility" to include veterinarians, veterinary staff, and veterinary clinics for the purpose of including them in existing law penalizing assault and battery of human health care personnel and unlawful disruption of the operation of a human health care facility.

MAINE

H.P. 621 died in committee. It would have created a new Class C criminal offense of Aggravated Operating a Motor Vehicle Under the Influence if the incident resulted in the death of a pet. Offenders would have faced a mandatory fine, incarceration, suspension of the driver's license, mandatory community service related to animal welfare, and financial restitution to the pet's owner.

MASSACHUSETTS

H.1817 and **S.1206** would allow courts handling divorce settlements to consider, in assigning ownership, care and custody of a pet, "the best interests of the animal, including the animal's health, safety, comfort and well being and whether any party or family member residing with any party has a history of abuse, cruelty or neglect to animals or humans."

H.1832 would update Sec. 21 of Chapter 119 to add humane officers to the list of professions mandated to report child sexual abuse. Currently, animal control officers are mandated to report, but not humane officers.

S.1234 would make any parent who allows their child to subject an animal to cruelty or abuse without taking steps to prevent, discourage or correct the action: liable for a fine of up to $500; and required to undergo psychiatric evaluation. The child would be required to participate in psychiatric rehabilitation under a psychologist who specializes in bullying. The family could be prohibited from having any unsupervised contact with animals and all current animals would be relocated to foster care.

MICHIGAN

HB 4300 would create a Courtroom Animal Advocate Program allowing judges to appoint a volunteer pro bono attorney or law student to represent the interest of the animal or of justice in prosecutions involving welfare or custody of animals.

HB 4993 would require landlords to release tenants from their rental agreement obligation upon presenting evidence of a reasonable apprehension of present danger to the tenant or the tenant's child from domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. Acceptable documentation could include a protection order; Michigan has allowed pets to be included in protection orders since 2016.

SB 111 (Sub. S-1) would allow elders and disabled and vulnerable adults to petition for a personal protection order that would include restraining an individual from harming, killing, torturing, neglecting, or removing an animal.

MINNESOTA

HF 1816 and **SF 1163** would create a statewide Link-based Office of Animal Protection office in the Department Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to be more effective in enforcing animal cruelty laws that protect animals and people. *The bills will carry over to the 2026 session.*

MISSOURI

HB 1298, HB 1513, SB 65 and **SB 655 died when the Legislature adjourned.** They would have added animal control officers and humane investigators to the professionals mandated to report suspected elder abuse and child abuse. APS and CPS workers, foster care advocates and volunteers, and psychologists, mental health professionals, social workers, school counselors, teachers, other school professionals, juvenile officers, law enforcement officers, probation or parole officers, and home health aides would be required to report suspected animal abuse to a hotline established by the Missouri Animal Control Association, with immunity from civil and criminal liability for good-faith reporting. APS and CPS workers would be required to complete one hour of training on how to identify and report animal abuse or neglect and The Link between elder and animal abuse. Animal control officers and humane investigators would be required to complete one hour of training on how to identify and report child and elder abuse and their Links with animal abuse.

NEBRASKA

SUCCESS!!! **LB 80** amends the state's laws for issuing all-encompassing "protection orders" — which include provisions to award custody of pets to the petitioner and enjoin the respondent from harming the pets — to create new specific categories of "domestic abuse protection orders," "harassment protection orders," and "sexual assault protection orders." Existing pet protection provisions would be retained only under a "domestic abuse protection order."

NEW HAMPSHIRE

SUCCESS!!! **HB 62 was signed into law.** It expands the state's current provisions that include animal cruelty within the definition of domestic violence abuse to include this definition within military protective orders for active U.S. military and National Guard members.

HB 593 was declared inexpedient to legislate. It would have allowed a spouse to recover damages for the "loss of consortium" from a spouse who intentionally or recklessly causes the death of that person's pet.

NEW JERSEY

A291 would expand the definitions of domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and abuse of persons with a disability to include acts of animal cruelty against their animals. 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 would be required to report suspected animal cruelty to law enforcement with civil and criminal immunity for reporting in good faith.

A 296 ("Shyanne's Law") would require mental health evaluation for all animal cruelty offenders.

A 310 would allow employees of the Division of Children Protection and Permanency who 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.

A369 would prohibit convicted animal cruelty offenders from having or being issued a permit a firearm for a handgun.

A 1516 would add "coercive control" to the definition of domestic violence to include acts of cruelty against animals owned or possessed by an adult or unemancipated minor.

Purple = Domestic Violence
Dark Blue = Child Abuse
Grey = Elder/Disabled Abuse
Pink = Animal Sexual Abuse
Green = Cross-Reporting
Orange = Court Animal Advocates
Red = Animal Hoarding
Brown = Assessments/Interventions

A 2456 and **S282** 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.

A 3236 and **S 966** would expand the definition of domestic violence to include psychological abuse. While intimidating threats against a person's animals are not specifically included in the state's definition of domestic violence, courts are allowed to consider such acts as coercive control in determining whether to issue a protective order.

A 3836 and **S 3362** would establish a $1,000,000 Domestic Violence Shelter Pet Grant Program to provide funds to house pets in shelters with their owners. Qualifying shelters could apply for up to $50,000 in grants.

S 26 would rename the Family Violence Protection Act as the Protection Against Abuse and Violence Act and replace the term "domestic abuse" with "abuse" that would now include "harm or threatened harm to an animal" within the definition of "abuse." Courts would be allowed to issue orders of protection that would enjoin the restrained party from committing or threatening to commit acts of "abuse" against the protected party or designated household members. Courts could also grant to any party the exclusive or shared possession and control of any animal kept, owned or leased by either party or any minor child in the household. The court could order any party to stay away from the animal and forbid the party from taking, transferring, concealing, mistreating, harming, or disposing of the animal.

NEW MEXICO

SB 26 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have defined coercive-control animal abuse as domestic violence and allowed pets to be included in protection orders. The bill would have renamed the Family Violence Protection Act as the Protection Against Abuse and Violence Act and replace "domestic abuse" with "abuse" that would include "harm or threatened harm to an animal" within the definition of "abuse." Courts could also have granted to any party the exclusive or shared possession and control of any animal and forbid the party from taking, transferring, concealing, mistreating, harming, or disposing of the animal.

SUCCESS!!! **SB 50** adds dogfighting and cockfighting to the list of crimes defined as "racketeering".

NEW YORK

A 599 would add acts of animal fighting, aggravated cruelty to animals, poisoning animals, injuring certain domestic animals, or harming a service animal to the definition of "serious offense" making it a crime to possess a firearm.

A 640 and **S 2296** would allow civil and criminal courts to order that a separate advocate be appointed to represent the animal's interests and help ensure the well-being of any living animal victims.

A 664, S 1044, S 1562, and **S 1563, "Buster's Law,"** would prohibit persons convicted of animal cruelty from possessing a companion animal until they have undergone psychiatric or psychological counseling establishing their mental capacity and ability to humanely case for the animal.

A 690 and **S 3491** would increase prison terms for acts of animal cruelty when committed in the presence of a child.

A 730 and **S 1205** would increase penalties for animal fighting and aggravated animal cruelty and requires defendants convicted of aggravated animal cruelty to undergo a psychiatric evaluation.

A 740 would allow courts to take into consideration the well-being of a companion animal when determining custody of the animal during divorce and legal separation proceedings.

A 850 would create new crimes of "cruelty to animals to threaten, intimidate or harass" for intentionally injuring or killing, with no justifiable purpose, a companion animal for the purpose of threatening, intimidating or harassing a family or household member. Felony penalties would be enhanced if the act occurred in the presence of a child.

A 897 would criminalize knowingly causing a minor to attend an animal fight.

A 1391 and **S 5544** would require persons charged with enforcing laws prohibiting cruelty to animals to file a report when, in the performance of their duties, they have reasonable cause to believe that abuse or maltreatment of a child has also occurred. The bill would further provide that persons charged with the responsibility of filing a report of child abuse or maltreatment would also have to file a report of suspected animal cruelty.

A 1432 and **A 1885** would relocate anti-cruelty statutes into the Penal Code from the Agriculture & Markets Law, where placement suggests that cruelty is not a "real" crime since it is not in the penal law and diminishes the seriousness of such crimes. The bill cites academic studies that "have found a clear link between animal cruelty during youth and violence against humans as an adult" and numerous documented studies that show that "there is a direct Link between acts of cruelty to animals and violence toward others, including child abuse, spousal abuse, elder abuse and other violent behavior . "

A 2250 would require humane law enforcement officers who have reasonable cause to believe that a person is a victim of domestic violence to report the situation to a local law enforcement agency, with immunity from civil and criminal liability for making a report in good faith. Currently, they are permitted — but not mandated — to report.

A 1530 would establish "care and treatment of service animals, therapy dogs and companion animals in residential programs for victims of domestic violence." These would include allowing residents' service animals and therapy dogs full access to the shelters as long as they do not create an undue burden.

Purple = Domestic Violence
Dark Blue = Child Abuse
Grey = Elder/Disabled Abuse
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Green = Cross-Reporting
Orange = Court Animal Advocates
Red = Animal Hoarding
Brown = Assessments/Interventions
Light Blue = Link & Other Crimes

A 1630 would amend provisions for the crimes of "sexual conduct with an animal," a misdemeanor, and "sexual conduct with an animal resulting in injury or death," a felony. Convicted offenders would be forced to relinquish all of their current animals and be permanently barred from keeping any animals, or residing, volunteering or working with animals.

A 1689 cites the prosecution of animal cruelty as a way to protect public safety to require all New York State counties to have an assistant district attorney to oversee animal crimes, as several counties in the state have already done.

A 1693 and **S 673** would establish the Housing People and Animals Together grant program to expand access for co-sheltering victims of domestic violence and people experiencing homelessness with companion animals.

A 1816, S 3158 and **S 4633** would include animal fighting as a criminal act within the category of enterprise corruption crimes.

A 1945 would enable veterinarians to earn continuing education credits for providing free veterinary care for individuals residing in domestic violence shelters.

A 2387 and **S 6812** would establish a 24-hour toll-free animal abuse reporting hotline.

A 3158 would require courts to require a mental health evaluation for offenders convicted of aggravated animal cruelty or animal fighting.

A 3206 and **S 1159** would create a new category of "domestic violence crimes" to include interfering, harassing, intimidating, or harming a family or household member's service animal.

A 3528 would make the commission of an act of aggravated cruelty to animals in the presence of a child a Class D felony.

A 4753 and **S 1753,** "Bella's Law," would require an investigation into possible domestic violence or abuse for persons who have been accused of animal abuse.

A 5815 and **S 4613** would expand provisions of the Family Court Act, the Criminal Procedure Law, and the Domestic Relations Law, which currently allow courts to order respondents to refrain from harming the companion animals of the petitioner or a minor child, to also grant petitioners exclusive care, control or custody of any animal.

A 6194 and **S 5998, "Kyra's Law,"** would require courts determining child custody and visitation rights to consider credible evidence that includes any party's history of domestic violence, child abuse, and threats to harm or kill companion animals.

A 6397 and **S 7350** would expand the definition of aggravated animal cruelty to include causing serious physical injuries or the use of a weapon.

A 6556 and **S 5514** would require courts to consider recent acts of aggravated cruelty to animals in determining whether grounds exist for issuing a temporary extreme risk protection order.

A 7831, S 6986 and S 7010 would make it a crime to assault a child protective services worker by releasing or failing to control an animal with the intent to obstruct the completion of their duties.

S 470 , "Kirby and Quigley's Law," expands aggravated animal cruelty to include harm to a companion animal during the commission of a felony.

S 1411 would require individuals convicted of animal cruelty to undergo a psychiatric analysis and evaluation.

S 6880 would authorize a lengthier prison sentence for committing aggravated animal cruelty during an incident of domestic violence.

A 8375 and **S 7612** would establish a co-shelter toolkit of best practices, resources, case studies, and information to inform and encourage implementing and sustaining co-sheltering models for victims of domestic violence and persons experiencing homelessness with companion animals.

S 8030 would require certain animal cruelty offenders to undergo a presentencing forensic psychological evaluation and, based on such evaluation, to attend counseling, humane education, a rehabilitation program, or other such treatment.

S 8035 would expand protection orders which allow courts to enjoin an individual from harming an animal to also allow courts to grant the petitioner exclusive care, custody or control of the animal.

NORTH CAROLINA

S 274 would repeal the archaic "crime against nature, with mankind or beast,," and replace it with the crime of "bestiality" as a Class I felony.

S 573 would require judges to order convicted companion animal hoarders to undergo psychological evaluation and treatment.

S 591 would make it a Class H felony to bring a minor under the age of 18 to a dog– or cock-fight.

OHIO

HB 417 would require 2 hours of peace officers' required 24-hour annual continuing education to be dedicated to education about laws governing animal welfare and cruelty.

OREGON

SB 626 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have expanded the definition of child sexual abuse to include exposing children to acts of bestiality created by artificial intelligence.

PENNSYLVANIA

HB 97 would recognize that "companion animals are living beings that are generally regarded as cherished family members that offer their owners companionship, security and assistance," and as a "special category of personal property" need to be granted special consideration in the division of property during marriage dissolution. Parties could enter into an enforceable agreement regarding the care and/or possession of companion animals, and the court shall consider all relevant factors.

HB 1611 would amend the Older Adults Protective Services Act to prohibit adult care homes, assisted living, home health care agencies, long-term nursing care, older adult daily living centers, and hospitals from employing someone within 20 years of having been convicted of sexual abuse of animals or children, among other crimes.

HB 1859 would allow courts to issue Extreme Risk Protection Orders, prohibiting persons with histories of domestic abuse or cruelty to animals from possessing firearms due to a substantial risk of suicide or causing the death of or serious bodily injury to another person.

HB 1932 would expand Pennsylvania's bestiality law to prohibit any form of sexual contact with an animal as well as organizing, promoting, aiding or participating in any such acts; committing such acts in the presence of a minor; and elevating the crime from a misdemeanor to a felony.

HB 1933 would require veterinarians, technicians and assistants, humane societies, and animal control agencies to report suspected aggravated animal cruelty to law enforcement, with immunity from civil and criminal liability and state licensing action.

SB 823 would allow state grants to law enforcement agencies to be used to investigate and enforce animal fighting.

RHODE ISLAND

H 5125 died in committee. It would have amended existing law, which allows courts to include household pets in domestic violence protection orders, to also allow courts to award custody of pets to plaintiffs and offer an enforcement remedy such as a restraining order or other injunctive relief.

H 5669 died in committee. It would have added animal cruelty offenses of "unnecessary cruelty," malicious injury, killing, and abandonment to the definition of domestic violence crimes.

SOUTH CAROLINA

H 3143 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have allowed individuals convicted of felony animal cruelty to apply for a limited pardon that would enable them to possess a firearm for hunting purposes because animal cruelty is not considered a "crime of violence."

H 3641 and **H 4123 died when the Legislature adjourned.** They would have expanded the definition of child sexual abuse and obscenity to include exposing children to acts of bestiality created by computer generated images.

SUCCESS!!! **S 28 was signed into law.** It creates a sex offender registry in which "buggery" (South Carolina's archaic term for bestiality) is defined as a Tier 1 offense.

TENNESSEE

SUCCESS!!! **HB 540** and **S 916** were signed into law on April 24. They expand the definition of "racketeering activity" to include engaging others in the criminal activity of animal fighting.

TEXAS

HB 3049 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have designated animal control officers as "first responders" whose duties include responding rapidly to an emergency.

HB 4563 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have allowed children or persons with a disability to be accompanied by a therapy or facility dog in various criminal proceedings.

SB 1658 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have allowed courts to issue Extreme Risk Protective Orders, prohibiting respondents from possessing firearms; Texas protection orders already prohibit respondents from harming, threatening or interfering with the custody of the plaintiff's pet, companion animal or therapy animal.

SB 1673 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have required courts to order individuals convicted of cruelty to non-livestock animals to undergo psychological counseling.

UTAH

SUCCESS!!! **HB 159 was signed into law on March 25.** It allows Utah authorities to recognize domestic violence protection orders issued in Canada. Utah protection orders already include provisions protecting household animals.

HB 461 failed to pass. It would have allowed courts to order animal cruelty offenders to participate in animal cruelty prevention or education programs, or psychological counseling for treatment of mental health disorders that the contributed to the commission of the crime.

SB 24 failed to pass. It would have included threatening an animal or forcing or coercing a child to injure an animal to the definition of child abuse.

VERMONT

H.492 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It introduced the concept of "coercive control" within the animal cruelty context. It proposed that persons who commit or threaten to commit animal cruelty upon an animal to influence a victim of domestic abuse may face additional criminal penalties.

WEST VIRGINIA

HB 2068 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have prohibited activities connected with sexual abuse of an animal, establish criminal penalties, provide for forfeiture of animals, and restrict ownership of animals upon conviction.

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CANADA

Bill C-225 would extend the Uttering Threats offense of the Criminal Code from five to 10 years for intimate partner violence offenders who threaten to kill, injure or poison an animal or bird that is the property of that person. The new bill would recognize that animals are also at risk of harm in relationships where there is intimate partner violence.

Purple = Domestic Violence
Dark Blue = Child Abuse
Grey = Elder/Disabled Abuse
Pink = Animal Sexual Abuse
Green = Cross-Reporting
Orange = Court Animal Advocates
Red = Animal Hoarding
Brown = Assessments/Interventions
Light Blue = Link & Other Crimes

LINK TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The Link Training Calendar

More and more organizations are recognizing the value of training their staffs, multi-disciplinary groups, and the general public that preventing and responding to animal abuse can prevent other forms of family and community violence.

Here are some of the many training opportunities coming up — both in-person and virtual — in coming months. Click on the underlined hyperlinks for specific details and registration information.

If you're conducting a Link training, please let us know at least a month in advance so we can include it in the Calendar. And if you're looking for a speaker, please contact us so we can refer someone to you from our Speakers' Bureau.

Dec. 12 — Raleigh, N. C. (online): Phil Arkow will present "Practical Guidance for the Effective Response by Veterinarians to Suspected Animal Cruelty, Abuse and Neglect" to the North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Dec. 21 — Tokyo, Japan (online): The Animal Literacy Research Institute will conduct a webinar, "The Impact of Witnessing Animal Abuse: The Possible Risks of Being Exposed to Animal Abuse."

Jan. 8-9, 2026 — Honolulu, Hawai'i: Multiple national and local experts will present at the Hawai'i Animal Law & Forensic Investigations Conference.

Jan. 14-15, 2026 — Ottawa, Ont., Canada (online): Forensic veterinarian Margaret Doyle, police investigator Sgt. Dennis Smithson, and criminologist Amy Fitzgerald will be among the speakers at the National Centre for the Prosecution of Animal Cruelty's Student Symposium on the Prosecution of Animal Abuse.

Jan. 20, 2026 — Kansas City, Mo. (online): Zoë Agnew-Svoboda of Besty BnB will present a webinar on "Pets and People: Safe, Together, Connected."

Jan. 21, 2026 -- Springfield, Ohio: Ohio Advocates for Animals, the Animal Welfare Institute, the Ohio Police Officer Training Academy, and the Ohio Domestic Violence Network will present a workshop on "The Link Between Animal and Human Violence: Fundamentals for Law Enforcement."

Feb. 4, 2026 — Warren, Ohio: Ohio Advocates for Animals, the Animal Welfare Institute, the Ohio Police Officer Training Academy, and the Ohio Domestic Violence Network will present a workshop on "The Link Between Animal and Human Violence: Fundamentals for Law Enforcement."

Feb. 18, 2026 — Pennsylvania (online): The Keystone Link Coalition will hold its regular bimonthly meeting.

March 2, 2026 — Honolulu, Hawai'i: Paul Needham will present "Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation and What Can We Do To Help? A Trauma-Informed Approach" at the 23rd annual Institute on Violence, Abuse and Trauma International Summit.

March 4, 2026 -- Lorain County, Ohio: Ohio Advocates for Animals, the Animal Welfare Institute, the Ohio Police Officer Training Academy, and the Ohio Domestic Violence Network will present a workshop on "The Link Between Animal and Human Violence: Fundamentals for Law Enforcement."

March 19, 2026 — Albuquerque, N. Mex. (online): Phil Arkow will present "Protecting 'Woman's Best Friend': A Call to Action for Pet Protection Orders in New Mexico" in a webinar for Animal Protection New Mexico.

March 24, 2026 — Edinburgh, Scotland: The Links Group UK will conduct its Links Veterinary Training Initiative.

March 24-26, 2026 — Ridgewood, N.Y. (online): My Dog Is My Home will hold its Annual Conference.

March 25, 2026 -- Nelsonville, Ohio: Ohio Advocates for Animals, the Animal Welfare Institute, the Ohio Police Officer Training Academy, and the Ohio Domestic Violence Network will present a workshop on "The Link Between Animal and Human Violence: Fundamentals for Law Enforcement."

March 25, 2026 — 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" in a webinar for the National Organization for Victim Advocacy's DoD Domestic Abuse Advocate Training Program.

LINK TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

March 26, 2026 — Colorado Springs, Colo;. (online): Phil Arkow will present "Learn What the Monster Likes… and Feed It! Bridging the Animal Rights/ Welfare/Control Gap by Focusing on The Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence" in a Justice Clearinghouse webinar.

April 15, 2026 — Pennsylvania (online): The Keystone Link Coalition will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

April 30, 2026 — Oakland, Calif.: Phil Arkow will present "Learn What the Monster Likes… and Feed It! Bridging the Animal Rights/Welfare/Control Gap by Focusing on The Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence" for the Association of Professional Humane Educators.

May 5-7, 2026 — Las Vegas, Nev.: Phil Arkow will present "Kids, Critters & Drugs: Connecting the Dots between Child, Animal and Drug Abuse" at the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children's 26 National Conference.

May 6, 2026 — Orlando, Fla.: Jessica Rock and other speakers will present at the International Society for Animal Forensic Sciences' 2026 Animal ForensiCon.

May 18-19, 2026 — Washington, D.C.: The National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges will conduct the 3rd Judicial Institute on the Human Animal Bond and the Link between Animal Cruelty and Interpersonal Violence: Issues in Family Law Cases at the George Washington University Law School.

June 8-9, 2026 — Austin, Texas: Phil Arkow will present on The Link at a conference of central Texas Children's Advocacy Centers.

June 17, 2026 — Pennsylvania (online): The Keystone Link Coalition will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

Aug. 18-20, 2026 — Lakewood, Colo.: Phil Arkow will present "Protecting 'Women's Best Friend': Assessing the Impact of Animal-Inclusive Protection Orders" at the Colorado Animal Welfare Conference.

Aug. 19, 2026 — Pennsylvania (online): The Keystone Link Coalition will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

Sept. 1, 2026 — Colorado Springs, Colo. (online): Phil Arkow will present "Closing the 'PAWS Gap' in Victim Advocacy through Pet -Inclusive Services" in a webinar for the Justice Clearinghouse.

Oct. 14-16, 2026 — Toronto, Ont., Canada: The International Association of Veterinary Social Work will hold its 9th Summit.

Oct. 21, 2026 — Pennsylvania (online): The Keystone Link Coalition will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

Dec. 16, 2026 — Pennsylvania (online): The Keystone Link Coalition will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

THE LINK… in the NEWS *(as if we need more proof…)*

Deputies Arrest Man Twice for Child and Animal Pornography

A Gray, La. man who had been arrested on Oct. 29 on charges of child pornography was re-arrested on Nov. 2 after detectives continuing their investigation allegedly found videos and photos depicting both child and animal sexual abuse. WDSU-TV reported that Angel Rodas, 25, was initially charged when Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's detectives allegedly found 66 files containing child sex abuse material, depicting children ranging from newborn to around 12-year-olds. After posting bond and being released, he was re-arrested after detectives said they found an additional 392 videos and photos depicting children ranging from 1 to 13 years old. They also found two videos involving the sexual abuse of animals. He was booked on 392 counts of pornography involving juveniles and two counts of sexual abuse of an animal with a bond set at $775,000.

Daughter Charged with Murdering Mother and Torturing Dog Found Fit to Stand Trial

The Kentucky woman accused of murdering and dismembering her mother and torturing a dog has been found competent to stand trial. The Lexington, Ky. *Herald Leader* reported that following a battery of psychological and cognitive mental health evaluations, Torilena Fields, 32, of Mount Olivet, was found fit to stand trial. Authorities noted there is still some question as to whether her mental state may have been the result of a traumatic motorcycle accident or drug use that led to a psychotic episode.

Fields was charged in October 2024 with shooting her mother in the head and stabbing her before decapitating, dismembering, and eviscerating her mother's corpse. She then allegedly placed her head, feet and forearms in a pot in the oven and heated them until they were charred. Men who had been hired by the mother to do work on the property and who had initially found the body said Fields had been "casting spells" and acting "confrontational" towards them (*See the November 2024 LINK-Letter).*

Parents Charged with Murder in Death of Daughter Killed by Malnourished Dog

The parents of an Oklahoma City two-year-old girl who was mauled to death after she was locked in a room with a possibly malnourished pit bull were charged with second-degree murder. KOCO-TV reported that Locklynn McGuire was killed and that she had been taken to a hospital two weeks previously after the same dog attacked her and partially severed one of her ears.

Oklahoma City police were called to the home for a welfare check where the girl's mother reportedly told officers, "My daughter got ate by the pit." Police found the girl's body covered in bite marks and other gruesome injuries.

Oklahoma City Animal Welfare removed four dogs from the home, three of which appeared to be malnourished. Two pet lizards and a rat were also impounded.

The parents, Jordan McGuire, 34, and Darci Lambert, 24, reportedly told police that they kept the dog in the child's room because the dog would kill their other dogs. The door had a double lock so the child couldn't escape, the station reported.

Locklynn McGuire

THE LINK… in the NEWS

Child Sex Abuse Investigation Leads to 24 Counts of Animal Sex Abuse

Collier County, Fla. Sheriff's deputies, following a cybertip investigation about child sexual abuse allegedly shared on Snapchat, arrested a former Naples man on 21 charges of animal cruelty and filming videos of animal sex activity.

Gulf Coast News reported that Emmanuel Mireles-Garza, 30, had messages that included solicitation of minors, requests for videos of children in other Snapchat users' neighborhoods and videos depicting sexual acts with animals. Deputies also established probable cause for Mireles-Garza for acts of sexual contact with his family dog.

The Sheriff's office worked with the Southwest Florida Inter-agency Child Exploitation and Persons Trafficking Task Force and the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force in the investigation.

Boyfriend Charged with Violently Assaulting Girlfriend's Cat

When a Cape Coral, Fla. woman was suspicious about one of her cat's injuries, she set up a secret home security camera and reportedly captured a video of her boyfriend violently pinning a cat to the ground and punching it repeatedly. *Gulf Coast News* said that police charged Travis Fehr, 27, with felony aggravated animal cruelty.

Officers met with the woman down the street and reviewed the video after the boyfriend had said the cat injured its leg in a fight with the other cat. "But it just didn't sit right with me," she said. "I know cats. I've had five before. It just wasn't adding up."

Texas Dogfighting Bust Nails 45 People, Narcotics and Firearms

Scene from the Sheriff's raid in Call, Texas

The Link between animal fighting and other crimes was apparent in Newton County, Texas in late November when a massive dogfighting ring was shut down. Sheriff's deputies, using an aerial drone to identify spotters who were acting as lookouts for law enforcement, raided a property and arrested 45 people. News media reported that 40 vehicles were towed, many of which contained illegal drugs and firearms. $73,858 in alleged betting money and 10 pitbulls were also seized, including two captured in mid-fight. The bust was part of Operation Pitbull, launched undercover last March in response to citizens' complaints.

"Dog fighting and animal cruelty will not be tolerated in Newton County," Sheriff Colton Havard said. "In my years in law enforcement, this is one of the most disturbing crimes I have ever witnessed, and the individuals involved should be ashamed of themselves. As your Sheriff, I vow to utilize every resource at our disposal to combat criminal activity in our county."

You Can Help Us Create Safer Communities!

The National Link Coalition is the only international education and advocacy organization working to prevent animal cruelty, domestic violence, child maltreatment, and elder abuse by showing how they are Linked. As the global resource center on The Link between animal cruelty and human violence we train multidisciplinary 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 ID #92-2607909.

Join us!

NationalLinkCoalition.org

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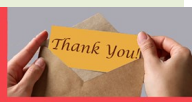

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