



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

The LINK-Letter  
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*A monthly report of news from*

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



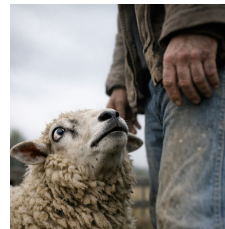
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Mexico law awards  
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## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... and THE LINK

### Animal/DV Shelter Partnership Saves Lives

**W**e know that one of the biggest barriers to seeking safety is the fear of leaving a pet behind," says Angela Prodrick, Executive Director of the [Blue Ridge Humane Society](#) in Hendersonville, N. C. . "By working with [Safelight](#), we've been able to remove that barrier and ensure that pets are cared for while their owners rebuild their lives. Together, we are helping create space for healing, stability, and the possibility to move forward without leaving a beloved companion behind."

Over the past two years, the partnership between the two shelters has built three dog and four cat kennels at Safelight, providing refuge to 22 cats and 20 dogs, allowing families to remain connected to their pets during some of the most difficult moments of their lives. "Now that we are 2 plus years in running this program, we have watched multiple clients move from crisis to sustainability with their pets alongside them," adds Dana Despradel, Program Director at Safelight.

Watch the National Link Coalition's 20-minute video tour of the Safelight kennels and an interview with Safelight CEO Lauren Wilkie on [YouTube](#).



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# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... and THE LINK

## “Jennifer’s Law”: Animal Abuse is Coercive Control in Connecticut



Jennifer Dulos (left) and Jennifer Magnano

**I**t recently came to our attention that we need to add Connecticut to the list of 19 other states and the District of Columbia where acts of animal abuse intended to intimidate a family member are also defined as acts of domestic violence, coercion or stalking.

In its 2021 legislative session, the Connecticut General Assembly enacted [PA 21-78](#) that established a general definition of domestic violence that includes coercive control as a form of domestic violence. The law was coined “Jennifer’s Law.”

Jennifer’s Law’s definition for “domestic violence” applies to all provisions related to family relations matters and support under Title 46b (Family Law). Coercive control of a family or household member – “a pattern of behavior that in purpose or effect unreasonably interferes with a person’s free will and personal liberty” -- was specifically identified in C.G.A. Sec. 46b-1 as a form of domestic violence.

Under the law, “coercive control” includes “unreasonably committing or threatening to commit cruelty to animals that intimidates the family or household member.”

The measure was named “Jennifer’s Law” in memory of two women, both named Jennifer, who were victims of domestic violence. Jennifer Farber Dulos had been missing since 2019 in the middle of divorce and child custody proceedings which included allegations of abusive behavior by her then-husband, who was subsequently arrested for her murder but died by suicide before a court hearing. Jennifer Magnano was fatally shot in front of her children in 2007 in a murder-suicide by her estranged husband, also in the middle of divorce and child custody disputes. Magnano’s children helped push for passage of the law named after her.

**S**tate lawmakers and courts are increasingly coming to recognize the significance of victims’ emotional attachments and caregiving responsibilities to their companion animals being used as a point of attack and vulnerability in domestic violence cases. By weaponizing these human-animal bonds, the animals become collateral damage both during the intimate partner violence and even post-separation.

In response, 20 states have enacted laws ([See the April 2025 LINK-Letter](#)) that define these acts as not just animal cruelty, but also as domestic violence, coercion, coercive control, or stalking:

**Alaska:** AS 18.66.990(3). Domestic violence.

**Arizona:** Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 13-3601. Domestic violence.

**Arkansas:** ACA § 9-15-403. Spousal abuse and emotional abuse.

**Colorado:** Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 18-6-800.3(1). Domestic violence and domestic abuse.

**Connecticut:** C.G.A. Sec. 46b-1. Domestic violence and coercive control.

**Delaware:** § 1041, Title 10 of the Delaware Code. Abuse.

**Indiana:** Ind. Code Ann. § 31-9-2-42 and

§ 34-6-2-34.5. Domestic or family violence.

Ind. Code Ann. § 35-46-3-12.5 Domestic violence animal cruelty.

**Kentucky:** KRS § 403.720. Domestic violence and abuse.

KRS § 456.010. Dating violence and abuse.

**Maine:** Maine Revised Statutes § Title 17-A, Part 2, Chap. 9, Sec. 201-1. Stalking.

**Massachusetts:** Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 209A, Section 1. Abuse and coercive control.

**Missouri:** V.A.M.S. 565.225 (2.1). Stalking.

**Nebraska:** Nebraska Revised Statutes § 43-2922. Domestic intimate partner abuse.

**Nevada:** Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 33.018(1)(e)(7). Domestic violence.

**New Hampshire:** RSA 173-B:1. Abuse.

**New Jersey:** Code of Criminal Justice C.2C:25-29. Coercive control.

**Oregon:** O.R.S. § 163.275. Coercion.

**Texas:** Texas Penal Code §42.072. Stalking

**Utah:** Utah Code 77-36-1. Domestic violence.

Utah Code 76-5-106.5. Stalking and emotional distress.

**Vermont:** 15 V.S.A. § 1101. Abuse and coercive controlling behavior.

**Washington:** RCW 7.105.010. Coercive control.

**District of Columbia:** Official Code §16-1001. Intrafamilial offense.

**Tennessee’s Code Ann. § 36-3-601(1)** which defined inflicting or attempting to inflict injury on an animal as “abuse,” was inexplicably deleted in 2023.

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... and THE LINK

## Canadian Bill Would Criminalize Bestiality “Deepfakes” and Domestic Violence Coercive-Control Animal Abuse

A potentially landmark move for protecting children, animals, and domestic violence survivors has been introduced into Canada’s Parliament that would criminalize images of animal sexual abuse and the use of animals as tools of coercive control in intimate partner violence.



The Hon. Sean Fraser

**Bill C-16, the Protecting Victims Act**, was introduced on Dec. 9 by Sean Fraser, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. In a [press release](#), Department of Justice Canada said the proposed overhaul of the Criminal Code would “protect victims

and keep kids safe from predators.” The measure would criminalize coercive control to facilitate intervention before intimate partner violence turns lethal; and modernize sexual violence protections by “prohibiting the distribution of non-consensual sexual deepfakes.”

They noted, “This legislation proposes stronger measures to address online sexploitation and child luring, including by criminalizing threatening to distribute child sexual abuse and exploitation material and distributing bestiality depictions, which are known to be used to manipulate children for sexual purposes.”

The bill includes a new offense of “representation of bestiality”, which would apply to anyone who “knowingly publishes, distributes, transmits, sells, makes available or advertises any visual representation that is or is likely to be mistaken for a photographic, film, video or other visual recording of a person committing bestiality.” Offenders could face up to five years in prison. The measure would also add representation of bestiality to prohibitions against child sexual abuse and exploitation materials.

The bill would create a new offense of “coercion or control of intimate partner”. This would include:

- Using, attempting to use or threatening to use violence against any animal that is in the care or is the property of the intimate partner; and
- Engaging in any other conduct if, in all the circumstances, the conduct could reasonably be expected to cause the intimate partner to believe that the intimate partner’s safety, or the safety of anyone known to them, is threatened, including controlling or attempting to control the manner in which the intimate partner cares for any animal.

Canada’s [Violence Link](#) inform us that the bill follows recommendations from the House of Commons Status of Women Committee’s report on [Coercive Control in Canada](#) (*See the [January 2026 LINK-Letter](#)*). That report recommended that:

- coercion and controlling behavior be made a specific offense;
- animal mistreatment be recognized as a form of coercive behavior;
- justice personnel and law enforcement be trained to assess this during investigations of intimate partner violence.
- the Government of Canada “support initiatives with women’s shelters whereby a companion animal can be accommodated, within reason.”



# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... and THE LINK

## Types of Intimate Partner Violence Linked with Dog and Cat Abuse

**A**ugmenting a similar article that examined whether the species of animal abused (dog, cat or small pet) is specifically Linked with specific forms of child abuse (psychological, physical, and very severe physical) among men and women perpetrators (*See the [January 2026 LINK-Letter](#)*), researchers at Kansas State University are reporting that not only are dog and cat abuse risk markers for intimate partner violence perpetration that warrant serious attention, but also that there are distinct groups of individuals based on their IPV and animal abuse perpetration.

Chelsea Spencer, Noah Renken and Brooke Keilholtz used a Latent Class Analysis of 809 participants in an online survey who answered questions regarding IPV and animal abuse about their current or recent intimate partners. Four distinct classes were identified:

- **The severe IPV and animal abuse class** was characterized by high probabilities of severe physical, minor physical, and psychological IPV perpetration, as well as medium probabilities of dog and cat abuse.
- **The poly-IPV and animal abuse class** was characterized by having relatively high probabilities of physical and psychological IPV perpetration and high probabilities of dog and cat abuse.
- **The psychological IPV only class** was characterized by a high probability of psychological abuse, and low probabilities of all other types of violence.
- **The no violence class** had low probabilities of all types of violence.



Chelsea Spencer (left), Noah Renken and Brooke Keilholtz

Additionally, perpetrator gender (being a man) predicted membership in the *poly-IPV and animal abuse class* compared to the *no violence class*.

— Spencer, C. M., Renken, N. D., & Keilholtz, B. M. (2025). A latent class analysis on intimate partner violence, dog abuse, and cat abuse perpetration, *Journal of Family Violence*, 1-12.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-00964-4>

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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

### Mexico Enacts Law to Award Custody of Pets in Divorce Settlements

**T**he movement to allow courts to award custody of pets in the animals' best interests during property settlements in divorces – many of which emanated from histories of domestic violence – has expanded to Mexico, where judicial authorities have issued new rulings regulating the ownership and care rights of pets in divorce cases. The move has been described as historic in the recognition of pets' emotional and social significance, particularly if they have been threatened as part of domestic violence's coercive control.

Under the new law, Mexican courts will be able to determine who has the "rightful" custody of dogs, cats, and other pets after a couple separates. Factors that courts may consider will include who was providing daily care for the animal, living conditions, and each party's financial ability to provide adequate healthcare and nutrition.

Court decisions can include the possibility of shared custody, where both parties will continue to be responsible for feeding, veterinary care, and time spent with the pets. Judges will be able to adjust the custody plan if either party fails to comply with the agreements.

In Mexico, as in the U.S. and other countries, the issue of pet ownership after divorce has been a source of ongoing legal disputes, often with the animal's best interests being disregarded. In cases where the couple disagree, the new regulations include mechanisms for a mediation process before resorting to court, where a Family Judge will make the decision based on the best



interest of the pets. The aim is to reduce disputes and ensure a smooth transition in animal care without overburdening either party.

The new law, inspired by an initiative called "Who Keeps the Dog", modifies the Federal Civil Code to include a new article, 284-Bis, that establishes a legal framework for resolving pet custody in divorce situations. Almost 70% of Mexican households are believed to have pets, and many see these animals as an integral part of the family.

Similar laws are believed to exist in France, Spain and Portugal. In the U.S., Alaska, California, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia have enacted similar laws since 2016.



### Virginia Bill Could Bar Animal Abusers from Having Firearms



Richard "Rip" Sullivan, Jr.

**A** bill in the Virginia General Assembly would add the concept of extreme risk protection orders which would prohibit animal cruelty offenders from having access to firearms.

**HB 901**, sponsored by Delegate Richard C. "Rip" Sullivan, Jr. (D—Fairfax) would allow courts to issue an "emergency substantial risk order" against individuals believed to pose a substantial risk of personal injury to himself or others. The order would include a ban on possessing firearms. Evidence courts could consider in issuing the order could include "any recent act of violence, force or threat by the subject of the petition toward an animal."

## ABA Webinar Explores Legal Issues of Pets and Domestic Violence

**W**e can't help pets if we don't help people; we're connected on both ends of the leash. Anytime animals and humans are together there's the potential for violence to happen."



**Katie Campbell**

Those were the watchwords of Katie Campbell, President & CEO of [RedRover](#) in an "Emerging Issues" webinar on pets and domestic violence for the American Bar Association's Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence. In describing

how 97% of pet owners consider their animals to be members of the family, Campbell noted how 19% of domestic violence shelters now have on-site pet programs. "We hope to see this number grow. The lack of pet friendly shelters is creating a barrier for many domestic violence survivors."

Campbell introduced the 90-minute webinar with an extensive review of the barriers survivors with pets face and what shelter staffs, advocates and attorneys can do to fully provide safety for both the human and non-human family members. These include:

- Always asking survivors about their pets and animal-related concerns in intakes and screenings;
- Being aware that both the pet parent and the pet may be experiencing abuse;
- Explaining this Link to others when trying to build a pet-friendly program;
- Allowing clients' pets in the shelter as a way to make it feel more like home; and
- Recognizing that clients' animal issues may involve unusual and farm animals as well as dogs and cats.

She described how it is not just coercive-control animal abuse, but also the removal of a pet from the survivor's life, that can be critical. Even in non-abusive homes companion animals can reduce the severity of our dissociation, anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms – all of which may be magnified by the multiple traumas survivors are experiencing. "Pets also help people manage the psychological aftermath of trauma by supporting our psychological well-being, decreasing sleep disturbances and alcohol abuse, and lowering

anger levels," she noted.

Coercive-control animal abuse can be physical or psychological, and Campbell encouraged participants to be on the lookout for the non-physical ways in which abusers harm survivors through their pets. Preventing victims from having pets' social support, isolating them from friends at dog parks, depriving the animals of veterinary or grooming care, or keeping her name off the animals' licenses are common techniques.

She recognized that caseworkers, attorneys and intake specialists already have extensive lists of questions they must ask, but couldn't emphasize enough how important it is to also ask about clients' animals and if they have fears for their well-being. Asking these questions "can help you build support and trust with your client. Building that trust and a relationship will make the rest of your job so much easier," she said. "Animal abuse is part of the lethality assessment; be sure to ask your client about it."

Megan Senatori, Executive Director of the [Center for Animal Law Studies](#) at the Lewis & Clark Law School, followed up with an extensive presentation on the legal issues embedded in domestic violence cases involving animals. She reiterated the need for attorneys to ask about clients' animals. "When a legal advocate



**Megan Senatori**

meets a domestic violence survivor you may be their first touchpoint, and if you touch the wrong door you might shut things down and she may never come back," she said.

Senatori delved into the details of specific provisions in laws in 42 states allowing pets to be included in protection orders, and Family Law in eight states where courts can award custody of animals in divorce settlements that take the animals' well-being into consideration. States' laws vary on which species or types of animals may be included, what kind of relief may be available in framing a request for a protective order, and whether animal mistreatment must be explicitly listed as a basis for obtaining an order or whether it is implied under other specified provisions.

*(Continued on Page 7)*

## ABA Webinar Explores Pets and Domestic Violence

(Continued from Page 6)

In states without these laws, advocates can work with case law or cite language from other states to help make a case for their clients. She cited Delaware and Maine as states whose statutes defining the standards for determining animals' well-being are particularly robust.

***"Animal abuse is part of the lethality assessment. Be sure to ask about it."***  
— ***Megan Senatori***

She described best practices to help attorneys fully understand the full scope of what the survivor has experienced. These include:

- During intake, ask if the client is concerned for the safety or well-being of pets and other animals;
- Review statutes to determine how best to meet pleading and evidentiary requirements;
- Regardless whether animal abuse or threats are the basis for seeking relief, consider including them in pleading allegations and proving them in evidentiary hearings;
- Be prepared to prove the impact of animal abuse or threats on the client;
- Ask for possession or control of the animal when possible;
- Include multiple forms of restraint from harm, including not hiding, transferring, concealing, or disposing of the animal.

There is still much to be done to solidify these procedures nationally, Senatori concluded. For example animals in homes where the couple are not married may not be covered under existing statutes. "This is still an emerging area of the law," she concluded.

"And part of your job will be to also educate the court. Don't assume that they know about The Link or that the judge even has a pet."

## Resource Guide for Foster Care of Survivors' Pets Updated

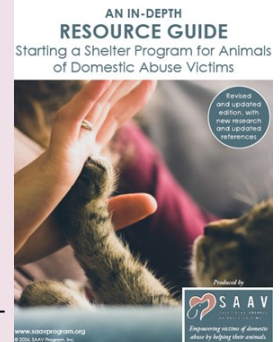
**S**heltering Animals of Abuse Victims – SAAV – founded in Dane County, Wis. in 2001 to aid domestic violence survivors with pets ([See the November 2012 LINK-Letter](#)), has updated its [In-Depth Resource Guide](#) to help agencies establish a community collaboration that provides foster care for survivors' animals.

Megan Senatori, SAAV Co-founder, explained that the free, 36-page ***Starting a Shelter Program for Animals of Domestic Abuse Victims*** provides new insights, statistics, and practical advice to spark start-up programs tailored to their community's needs. The guide includes background on The Link between domestic violence and animal cruelty, how to start a foster care program, and sample and model shelter forms.

The guide lists the top 10 considerations in starting a program:

1. **Research the need for services**
2. **Identify potential collaborators**
3. **Develop a program model**
4. **Consider the duration of services**
5. **Protect confidentiality**
6. **Determine which types of animals will be sheltered**
7. **Establish parameters for the scope of veterinary services**
8. **Identify funding sources**
9. **Train foster parents and volunteers**
10. **Protect against liability risks**

The guide emphasizes that companion animals are valuable sources of comfort and support for victims and their children. Sadly, perpetrators of abuse often exploit this bond to exert power and control. This dynamic, compounded by challenges such as securing safe and affordable pet-friendly housing, creates a barrier for survivors of abuse with pets to leave an abusive partner.





## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... and THE LINK

### New York Adds Animal Cruelty History as Grounds for Issuing Extreme Risk Protection Orders

**N**ew York has joined a handful of states which now allow courts to consider a history of animal cruelty as a factor in determining whether to issue a Temporary Extreme Risk Protection Order (TERPO) which bars respondents from owning, purchasing, possessing, or receiving a firearm or ammunition due to a heightened risk of violence.

Previously, judges could issue a TERPO based on threats of violence, reckless use or brandishing of firearms, substance abuse, and other factors at their discretion. The new law explicitly adds animal cruelty to this list.

New York Governor Kathy Hochul signed **A 6556** and **S 5514** on Oct. 16, and its provisions took effect immediately. The bill's sponsors, Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal and Sen. Michelle Hinchey, cited an FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin that characterized recent research into animal abuse as showing "a well-documented Link that it is a predictive or co-occurring crime with violence against humans...and is associated with other types of violent offenses," noting that increased awareness of this Link "strengthens the identification and reduction of such crimes."

They also cited the National Sheriffs Association and that New York law has allowed courts to include companion animals in regular protection orders for almost 20 years. "Expanding the TERPO criteria to explicitly include cruelty to animals is an important step in protecting New Yorkers by recognizing the strong connection to violence against people," they added.

ERPOs, which may be ex parte or temporary, are now allowed in at least 19 states. They usually are the result of a petition by law enforcement and/or a family member fearing an immediate risk of the respondent posing an imminent and present danger of causing personal injury to himself, herself, an intimate partner, or another. Some states allow petitioners to present all relevant evidence. Other states' grounds are more specific, stating the courts may consider such evidence as: the unlawful use or brandishing of a firearm; history of alcohol or substance abuse; suicide threats; re-



Linda Rosenthal and Michelle Hinchey

cent or previous acts or threats of violence or stalking toward the respondent or other persons; violation of other protection orders; mental illness; or a pattern of violent acts or threats.

National organizations which support issuing Extreme Risk Protection Orders include the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Everytown for Gun Safety and the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. They have argued that ERPOs can be highly successful in preventing intimate partner shootings, suicides, mass shootings, and other homicides.

#### STATE LAWS ADDING ANIMAL CRUELTY AS GROUNDS FOR ISSUING EXTREME RISK PROTECTION ORDERS

##### CONNECTICUT

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 29-38c(a).

##### COLORADO

C.R.S. § 13-14.5-105. Hearings on petitions – grounds for order issuance

##### MAINE

34-B MRS § 3862-A(6)(c) . Extreme risk protection orders.

##### NEW JERSEY

N.J. Code of Criminal Justice §2C:58-23. Filing of temporary extreme risk protection order

##### NEW YORK

Consolidated Laws of New York Civil Practice Laws & Rules, Art. 63-A, § 6342. Issuance of a Temporary Extreme Risk Protection Order

##### OREGON

O.R.S. §166.527. Petition for ex parte order; issuance and service of order; request for hearing

##### RHODE ISLAND

R.I. Gen. Laws § 8-8.3-5. Hearings on petition – Grounds for issuance – Contents of order



### Florida Considers Protecting Children from Animal Cruelty

**A** bill in the Florida Legislature would add the Sunshine State to the growing list of jurisdictions that recognize the potential harmful impact of animal cruelty perpetrated by, or witnessed by, children.



**Sen. Arrington** **SB 676**, introduced by Sen. Kristen Aston Arrington (D—Kissimmee) would make it a third-degree felony for a person over age 18 to cause or entice a minor to commit an act of aggravated animal cruelty, animal fighting, or sexual activities with an animal. It would similarly be a third-degree felony to commit such acts in the presence of a minor.

A companion measure, **HB 559**, was introduced in the Florida House.

Several states already have enacted statutes that provide enhanced penalties for acts of animal cruelty, neglect, fighting, and/or sexual abuse committed or witnessed by minor children. These include Hawai'i, Illinois, Indiana, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Federal law increases the potential penalty for sponsoring, participating, or attending an animal fight from one year in prison to three years if a child under age 16 is brought to the event.

A number of states' laws already specifically criminalize children's committing or witnessing acts of animal cruelty, sacrifice, fighting, or sexual abuse in the presence of a minor, but it is not clear whether such crimes result in increased penalties. These include: Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Washington.

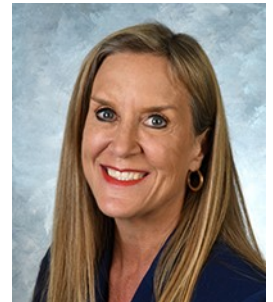
### Kentucky Proposes Training Animal Control Officers about Child Abuse

**K**entucky would patch up a gap in state laws and recognize the potentially predictive nature of animal cruelty leading to child abuse if a bill introduced on Jan. 8 into the General Assembly were to pass.

**HB 246 ("Kyan's Law")**, sponsored by Rep. Susan Witten (R—Louisville) would require Kentucky animal control officers to receive training on recognizing child abuse and neglect. The programs would be evidence-informed training courses designed by the Animal Control Advisory Board and could be made available either in-person or virtually to all animal control officers within 120 days of being employed, appointed or contracted.

Significantly, the bill provides that the courses "shall cover, at a minimum, current information regarding the connection between animal abuse as a predictor crime with a statistically significant correlation to active or future instances of interpersonal violence such as child abuse, domestic violence, elder abuse, and sexual assault."

Kentucky is not one of the 11 states where animal control officers are mandated to report suspected child maltreatment, and the bill does not appear to add a reporting mandate.



However, Kentucky is one of the 18 states in which everyone is mandated to report suspected child abuse or neglect, and animal control officers have not systematically received training about this. The law, if enacted, would acquaint ACOs with this responsibility and give them tools with which to file credible reports that could save the lives of children and animals.

**Rep. Susan Witten**

## Midwest Veterinary Conference Features Six Link Sessions

**T**he 2026 [Midwest Veterinary Conference](#) is making a major addition to veterinary awareness of The Link between animal abuse and human violence and veterinarians' roles and responsibilities in preventing and responding to both by including six Link workshops. The programs are all scheduled on one day, Feb. 26, in Columbus, Ohio, as part of the conference's Shelter Animal Track:

### From Clinic to Courtroom: Collaborative Responses to Animal Cruelty Cases



**Kris Otteman**

Kris Otteman, Emily Lewis and Linda Fielder will describe how animal cruelty cases may present in clinical practice, or how the veterinary team may be asked to assist by law enforcement investigating a possible case. A veterinary team working in a shelter environment may also be the first point of contact for a victim animal. They will cover 10 steps every veterinary team can take to educate, prepare, and act when confronted with a possible animal cruelty case in any scenario. The practical information will result in improved competency and confidence in contributing to these cases.

### See Something, Say Something: Our Duty to Report Animal Cruelty



**Emily Lewis**

With increasing laws mandating veterinarians to report animal cruelty, many professionals feel unprepared. Otteman, Lewis and Fielder will address common concerns, demystify the reporting process, and offer basic skills needed by the team to confidently fulfill their duties.

### Deadliest Match: A Case Study on Intimate Partner and Pet Abuse

Using a case study of a woman whose tragic experience changed the course of her life forever, Otteman, Lewis and Fielder will explain how these situations underscore The Link between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence. They will examine the veterinarian's crucial role in reporting animal cruelty, address challenges, and prepare clinicians to fulfill their obligations under both the veterinary oath and the law.



**Linda Fielder**

### Partnering with Human Services Organizations



**Matt Pepper**

A pet is only as healthy and safe as the family it lives with and the community it lives in. Similarly, a stable family environment is just as impactful to the family pet. Matt Pepper, President & CEO of the Michigan Humane Society, will discuss the value of looking at both ends of the leash and how Michigan Humane uses that approach to create healthier, safer, and more vibrant communities for the people and pets of Metro Detroit.

### Recognizing The Link Between Interpersonal Violence and Animal Abuse

Animal abuse and cruelty is a predictor and indicator of family, child, and elder violence. Veterinary Social Worker Aviva Vincent will talk through what veterinary staff need to know about The Link



**Aviva Vincent**

between interpersonal violence and animal abuse. Types of abuse will be defined to illustrate identifiers for suspected coercive control, neglect, maltreatment, cruelty, and animal sexual abuse. She will frame all content within the professional scope of practice and share resources for cross-reporting, network building, and legal support, including pet protection orders.

### Mandated Reporting of Suspected Animal Abuse: How, to Whom, and What Next

Reporting of suspected animal and human abuse is a mandated responsibility for most licensed professionals. Vincent will clarify the legal obligations for humane agents and animal care workers in reporting suspected animal, child, and elder abuse and interpersonal violence. Working from the veterinary professional scope of practice, she will establish what constitutes reasonable suspicion, who is recognized as a mandated reporter, who to call for cross-reporting, and how to document. The program will offer resources with the intention of expanding networks and supporting veterinary professionals.

### Utah Bill Proposes Cross-Reporting and Protections for Veterinarians

A comprehensive and multi-part bill has been introduced into the Utah State Legislature that would initiate cross-reporting between animal abuse and child maltreatment agencies and would add protections to veterinarians who report suspected animal abuse.

**SB 115**, sponsored by Sen. Jen Plumb (D – Salt Lake County), would require city and county animal control officers to report suspected child maltreatment to the Division of Child and Family Services under three circumstances:

- If there is a child in the home with the alleged abused or neglected animal;
- If a child safety concern is observed during the animal abuse investigation; or
- If the officer takes “serious enforcement action” in a home with a child.

At least once each quarter, the state Administrative Office of the Courts would be required to report all convictions of animal cruelty offenses during that quarter to DCFS, which would then have to determine and document whether individuals and addresses identified in the report warrant further investigation for possible child abuse or neglect. Individuals could not be investigated for child abuse or neglect based solely on a conviction described in the quarterly report.

DCFS would be permitted to notify local animal control authorities if, in the course of their investigations, an animal resides in a home where a finding of child abuse or neglect is confirmed.

In addition, a DCFS caseworker investigating alleged child abuse or neglect would be permitted to report a concern of animal abuse to a local animal control or law enforcement authority.



Sen. Jen Plumb

#### VETERINARY CROSS-REPORTING

Utah veterinarians are already permitted to report suspected animal cruelty to law enforcement or other authorities with immunity from civil and criminal liability. **SB 115** would augment those protections by prohibiting a veterinarian’s employer from:

- Prohibiting her or him from making such a report; or
- Penalizing the veterinarian that makes a report.

#### Position Available: VP of Forensic Sciences for the ASPCA

The ASPCA has announced a position opening for a Vice President of Forensic Sciences to lead the department consisting of eight forensic veterinarians, one licensed veterinary technician, two forensic analysts, two forensic sciences coordinators, and one forensic sciences manager, in the New York and Gainesville teams. The starting pay ranges from \$186,000 to \$245,000 for non-veterinarians, and \$206,000 to \$265,000 for veterinarians. [Details and an application](#) are available on ASPCA’s careers pages.



#### ***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](http://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.



### West Virginia – Again – Appears to Want to Keep Bestiality Legal

**T**he State of West Virginia appears to be poised, once again, to be a national embarrassment as the only state in the U.S. where having sex with animals is still legal. Over 1,900 bills have been introduced in the current legislative session — and none address bestiality.

Curiously, West Virginia has numerous state and local laws prohibiting the distribution or exhibition of obscene materials that depict bestiality -- but no laws against the act itself.

For example, **HB 4412**, in the current legislative session which ends on March 14, would establish liability for publishers and distributors of sexual material harmful to minors, including “patently and sexually offensive” materials including bestiality. It does not, however, criminalize the persons sexually assaulting these animals.

West Virginia’s Code **§61-8A-1** includes bestiality among obscene matter which cannot be distributed or exhibited to minors, and **§61-8C-1** makes the filming of sexually explicit conduct of minors, including bestiality, illegal. Again, it would appear that if these sexual acts are not filmed or photographed or shown to minors there is no crime involved.

West Virginia Code **§55-20-2** allows for civil remedies for unauthorized disclosure of intimate images, including acts of bestiality. Assuming the person having sex with the animals is a willing participant (even if the animal is not) no crime has occurred.

West Virginia Code **§7-1-4** and **§8-12-5b** grant county commis-

sioners and municipalities authority to enact ordinances restricting activities in relation to obscene matter, defined as “patently offensive representation” of a number of activities, including bestiality. However, a cursory review of several such laws appears to, once again, leave an enormous loophole.

For example, Wheeling’s ordinance **§517.01** includes acts of bestiality within the definition of “patently offensive” obscene matter that cannot be displayed but does not make the act itself illegal. Projectionists, ticket takers, ushers and other employees working at a facility where such films might be shown cannot be “prosecuted” (*sic*).

The municipal code of Charleston makes it illegal to exhibit, sell or give away obscene material without defining what that is. South Charleston does not appear to have a specific ordinance, but the “Indecency and Obscenity” section of its ordinances references its authority under state law to prohibit distribution of undefined obscene literature.

Forty-nine states have now criminalized bestiality or animal sexual abuse, largely in recognition of its adverse effects on both the animals, humans and society. The molestation of an animal by a human, like rape, is the eroticization of violence, control, and exploitation. Animal sexual abuse is the



single strongest predictor of increased risk for committing child sexual abuse and there are case studies of children being groomed for sexual abuse by being forced to interact sexually with animals.

Because high rates of sexual assault of animals have been found in the backgrounds of rapists and serial sexual homicide perpetrators, animal sexual abuse is now tracked by the FBI as a Group A offense in the National Incident Based Reporting System, in the same category as rape and murder.

Establishing animal sexual abuse as a separate crime allows law enforcement to identify potentially dangerous sexual predators in their community.



# ABUSE OF THE ELDERLY & DISABLED...and THE LINK

## Bills Aim to Protect Service Animals from Threats or Harm

**R**ecognition that threats to companion animals can be used to coerce and control domestic violence victims appears to be expanding into a new arena — service animals of people with disabilities. At least six state legislatures have introduced bills this session that would criminalize acts of harm or threats to service animals.

**Illinois SB 2091** would make it a felony to injure or kill a service animal. The amendment to the Humane Care for Animals Act would also include the willful or malicious harm or death of animals used by law enforcement agencies, search-and-rescue teams, and arson investigators' accelerant detection canines.

**Michigan HB 4542** would make an individual responsible for the harm, injury or death of a service animal liable for economic damages. These could include: the economic value of the animal, its equipment, cost of care, and cost of replacing it; punitive damages if the liable person was intentional or reckless; and attorney's fees and court costs. Persons would be liable whether the conduct that caused the injury was intentional, reckless or negligent.

**South Dakota SB 81** would clarify the definition of the crime of harming a service animal belonging to a person with a disability to remove the requirement that the animal be in its harness at the time of the injury. Violation would be a misdemeanor. It also clarifies that the provisions pertain only to service animals trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability and not emotional support animals.



**West Virginia SB 192** would create a new misdemeanor crime of Assault Upon a Service Animal and subject the offender to making financial restitution for costs. It, too, limits the crime to animals serving persons who are blind, deaf, hearing impaired, or who have mobility impairments. It would be illegal to: taunt, torment, strike, interfere with, or release the animal; inhibit the assisted person's control of the service animal; or inhibit or restrict the ability of the service animal to assist the person. In addition to the misdemeanor crime, violators could be made responsible to pay for veterinary bills, equipment replacement, further training or re-training, or replacement of the animal.

**Utah HB 23** would increase the penalty for injuring, harassing or endangering a service animal from a misdemeanor to a felony.

**Maryland HB 282 and SB 182** would add "psychological harm" to the definition of abuse of a vulnerable adult, "the observable, identifiable and substantial impairment of a vulnerable adult's ability to function due to severe emotional distress caused by an intentional act or series of acts." It is not clear whether threats to, or harm of, a vulnerable adult's animal — whether a companion animal or a service animal — could be specifically categorized as psychological harm.

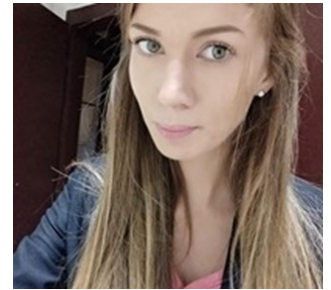
## THE LINK in THE LITERATURE

### Link Cited in Call for Stronger Anti-Cruelty Punishments in Serbia

In Serbia, as in virtually every other country worldwide, convictions for acts of animal cruelty rarely receive severe sentences. A new study points out the social significance of sanctioning perpetrators of criminal acts against animals, drawing attention to “the fact that scientific research and practice have shown that violence against animals often leads to violence against people and that punishing perpetrators actually protects both animals and people.”

Natalija Živković, a Ph.D. candidate in the University of Belgrade Faculty of Law, contributed this chapter in a book calling for greater legal protections for animals. She cites Link research stating that while animals are sentient beings that can experience pain, suffering, fear and stress, there is also an adverse societal dynamic to animal cruelty. “Animal abuse is perpetrated on the same dynamics of power and control that often characterize intimate partner violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and other violent antisocial behaviors. Many studies show that perpetrators of cruel and inhumane crimes began their criminal careers by committing violence against animals,” she writes.

After demonstrating the need for courts to impose stiffer sentences on animal abusers rather than just warnings, she presents a critical review of prescribed sanctions and comparative legal solutions. She follows this with a statistical overview of Serbian courts’ “penal policy” for the criminal act of killing and abusing animals from 2006 to 2022.



Natalija Živković

-- Živković, N. (2024) Criminal policy of courts regarding the killing and abuse of animals. In: *Legal protection of animals: towards amendments to the animal welfare law*.

Faculty of Law, Belgrade, pp. 109-124.  
ISBN 978-86-6132-154-2 [In Bosnian]



### Human Violence Potential Drives Calls for Animal Cruelty Punishments

An Australian study examining the factors that drive community expectations for more severe penalties for animal cruelty offenses has identified five influencers of public opinion, including recognition via The Link that more serious offenders pose a greater danger to society.

Alexandra Whittaker and colleagues at the University of Adelaide identified five drivers affecting the public’s call for higher punitive approaches to sentencing:

- (1). The degree of animal suffering;
- (2). Providing assistance rather than punishment;
- (3). The role of media reporting;
- (4). How to deter offenders; and
- (5). The intentions of the offender.



The addition of “aggravated” categories in animal cruelty crimes “recognizes that some acts have a greater degree of culpability and the offender poses a greater danger to society, especially considering the established link between animal and

human violence,” they write, citing nine Link references.

— Morton, R., Hebart, M.L., Ankeny, R.A., & Whittaker, A.L. (2025). The drivers of community expectations surrounding punishment for animal welfare offences: Findings from online focus group discussions. *Anthrozoös*, 38(6), 1055-1073.



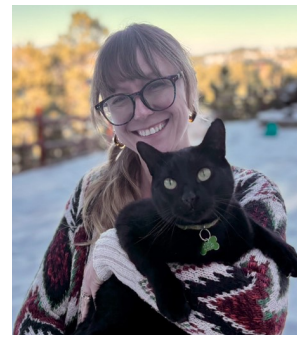
### Link Components Cited as Keys in Addressing Animal Cruelty

A new [study](#) from researchers at Colorado State University's Animal-Human Policy Center examines what proven strategies, persistent challenges, and critical resource gaps in current animal protection systems help — and hinder — efforts to address animal cruelty and neglect nationwide. Link issues featured prominently in the findings.

Rebecca Niemiec, Lori Kogan and Claire Vaiden conducted 50 in-depth interviews with investigators, prosecutors, veterinarians, social workers, and policy experts from 14 states. The participants consistently identified elements that improve outcomes in animal cruelty cases. Key elements leading to success in addressing animal cruelty cases included collaboration with human health services, emphasizing The Link, and cross-reporting with human health services.

Among the most commonly identified best practices for addressing animal cruelty cases were:

- Strong partnerships between law enforcement, attorneys, humane agents, and other stakeholders;
- Veterinarians (often from humane societies) who can help on scene with animal care, investigations and courtroom testimony;
- Training for law enforcement and animal control officers on investigation techniques, animal cruelty laws and processes, where to find resources for animal cases, and The Link between human and animal crimes;



Rebecca Niemiec (left), Lori Kogan and Claire Vaiden

- Dedicated humane investigators and prosecutors who specialize in animal cruelty cases;
- Support of social workers to address the underlying drivers of animal neglect and abuse and ensure the people involved receive the help they need; and
- Collaboration and cross-reporting with human health services.

“In the past several decades, animal crimes have become an increasingly high priority for policymakers, law enforcement, non-profit organizations, and attorneys,” they explain. “This focus on addressing animal cruelty has not only been motivated by an increasing public interest in animal welfare, but also by research demonstrating The Link between animal and human crimes.”

They describe how this increased priority from national and local organizations has succeeded in improving state laws addressing animal cruelty and increasing resources to enforce those laws.

“Despite these successes, stakeholders emphasized ongoing challenges,” they advise. “Law enforcement officers often lack specialized training and resources,

animal housing and transport options are limited, and animal cruelty cases are frequently treated as a lower priority than other crimes. Difficulties working across agencies and securing veterinary support were also common barriers,” they write.

The findings suggest that addressing animal cruelty effectively requires sustained investment in specialized personnel, training for key stakeholders, stronger partnerships between animal and human health services, and expanded infrastructure for animal care. Together, these approaches can improve both animal welfare outcomes and public safety nationwide, they conclude.

-- Niemiec, R., Kogan, L., & Vaiden, C. (2026). *Lessons Learned from Addressing Animal Cruelty and Neglect Across the United States*. Fort Collins: Colorado State University Animal-Human Policy Center.



## Growing GLOBAL LINK AWARENESS

### Academic Research Continues to Expand in “Link Deserts”

In recent years we have noticed a distinct increase in Link awareness and academic research in other countries, particularly in non-First World nations where a few lonely individuals are bringing this information into areas we have been calling “Link Deserts” (See the [August 2024 LINK-Letter](#)). LINK-Letter readers will have noticed an increasing number of Global Link Awareness icons in recent issues as we draw special attention to how the Link message we pioneered in the U.S. is rapidly gaining traction worldwide.

For example, some 28% of the references in our [Bibliography](#) of Link resources now originate from researchers in foreign countries, and over 17% of LINK-Letter readers are located in 82 countries around the globe. In 2025, of the 349 articles published in *The LINK-Letter*, 93 (27%) described programs, legislation or research in other countries.

A new analysis of this phenomenon comes courtesy of our co-founder and Vice President Randy Lockwood. He tracked the number of academic publications that cited an article that he and National Link Coalition President & Secretary Phil Arkow published in a 2016 issue of *Veterinary Pathology* – “Animal abuse and interpersonal violence: The cruelty connection and its implications for veterinary pathology.” Intriguingly, of the 147 publications that cited the article, 123 -- 84% -- were written by authors based in foreign countries.

While many of these publications came from countries with established Link activity --Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Spain and the



Randy Lockwood

United Kingdom – a significant number originated in “Link Desert” nations. Brazil by far had the greatest number of citations (24), perhaps because of growing interest in veterinary forensics in South America’s largest nation.

What also encourages us is to see the handful of pioneering researchers investigating these topics in such countries as Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad & Tobago, Turkey, and Ukraine.



### Link Cited in Hawaii Proposal for Stronger Anti-Cruelty Law

An underlying principle of The Link is that the adverse impact on human health and community safety resonates more powerfully with legislators than do appeals based on the moral imperative of animal welfare or the call for granting animals rights. An example of this is currently on the legislative table in Hawaii with [HB 698](#).

The measure would increase the category of offense for various forms of animal cruelty, sexual assault of an animal and dogfighting. What is perhaps most significant is the preamble to the bill which reads as follows:

“The legislature finds that animal cruelty offenders are a threat to the health and safety of all members of our communities, especially vulnerable populations. Recent research has shown that animal cruelty is a predictive and co-occurring crime with violence against

humans, including children, intimate partners, and the elderly. Psychological studies show that 70% of violent criminals began by abusing animals. Children who witness animal abuse are also more likely to abuse animals as teenagers and adults.

“The legislature further finds that there has been a significant increase in animal cruelty cases in Hawaii over the past five years. According to the Honolulu police department, there were 73 animal cruelty crimes in 2023 compared to 58 in 2018. The prevalence of animal cruelty crimes in the State and its correlation with other serious violent crimes warrants increased penalties for offenders.”



# LEGISLATION... and THE LINK

The majority of states have begun to introduce proposed legislation for their 2026 sessions. We're tracking these new bills and are already following an astounding 146 new and carried-over measures:

Purple bills address domestic violence and pet protection orders

Dark blue bills address child abuse and maltreatment

Grey bills address abuse of the elderly and disabled

Pink bills address animal sexual abuse

Green bills address cross-reporting among animal care & control, veterinary and human services professionals

Orange bills address court-appointed advocates for animals

Red bills address animal hoarding

Brown bills address psychological assessments, interventions and treatments for animal cruelty offenders

Light blue bills address 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

## FLORIDA

**SB 468** and **HB 921** 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.

**SB 676** and **HB 559** would make it a felony for an adult to commit aggravated animal cruelty in the presence of a minor, or cause a minor to commit aggravated animal cruelty, animal fighting, or sexual activity with an animal.

**SB 796** would allow the Board of Veterinary Medicine to rescind the registration of any veterinary professional associate, veterinary technician, or veterinary technologist who is convicted of animal cruelty or animal fighting.

**HB 277** and **SB 682** 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

**SB 102** would extend existing prohibitions against dogfighting to include cockfighting, including: owning, training, transporting, selling, charging admission, permitting a minor to attend, or wagering on any cock for the purpose of fighting.

## HAWAII

**HB 698** would increase criminal penalties for various forms of animal cruelty because "The legislature finds that animal cruelty offenders are a threat to the health and safety of all members of our communities, especially vulnerable populations. Recent research has shown that animal cruelty is a predictive and co-occurring crime with violence against humans, including children, intimate partners, and the elderly."

## 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 misdemeanor 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 1904** would require, rather than permit, courts to award petitioners costs and attorney's fees if a civil no-contact order is granted. These orders include requiring the respondent to stay away from and not harm any animals.

**HB 3028** would expand the definition of prohibited dissemination of bestiality and other obscene sexual materials to include computer-generated images.

**HB 3367** and **HB 4475** 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.

**SB 1716** would expand the definition of prohibited dissemination of bestiality and other obscene sexual materials to include the use of "end-to-end encryption messaging systems or devices," such as encrypted messaging and email services.

**SB 2091** would make it a felony to injure or kill a service animal.

**SB 2103** would expand protections granted to petitioners' pets under Stalking No Contact Orders to Harassment No Contact Orders.

## INDIANA

**HB 1165** would increase the penalty for animal cruelty from a Class A misdemeanor to a Level 6 felony if the offense is committed in the immediate presence of a minor.

## IOWA

**HF 227** and **869** would grant veterinarians immunity from administrative, criminal or civil liability for making good-faith reports of alleged animal misconduct. Veterinarians who knowingly make false reports would be subject to disciplinary action and civil liability and would be guilty of a misdemeanor.

**HF 670** would give juvenile courts jurisdiction in proceedings concerning a child under 17 years of age if the alleged offense is animal torture.

## KENTUCKY

**HB 125** would create new crimes of possession of a firearm by convicted domestic violence abusers and subjects of domestic violence protection orders.

**HB 246 ("Kyan's Law")** would require animal control officers to receive training on recognizing child abuse.

## MAINE

**LD 962 died in committee.** It would have created a new crime of Aggravated Operating Under the Influence for causing the death of a pet.

## MARYLAND

**HB 282** and **SB 182** would add "psychological harm" to the definition of abuse of a vulnerable adult, "the observable, identifiable and substantial impairment of a vulnerable adult's ability to function due to severe emotional distress caused by an intentional act or series of acts." It is not clear whether threats to, or harm of, a vulnerable adult's animal could be specifically categorized as psychological harm.

## 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 4542** would make an individual responsible for the death or injury of a service animal liable for economic damages.

**HB 4648** would add sentencing enhancement points for causing the death of a companion animal during the commission of another crime.

**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 in the Department Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to be more effective in enforcing animal cruelty laws that protect animals and people.

## MISSOURI

**HB 2292** and **SB 899** would require animal control officers and animal humane investigators to report suspected elder abuse and child abuse. Child and adult protective services workers, psychologists, mental health professionals, social workers, school counselors, educators, and law enforcement, probation and parole officers would be required to report suspected animal abuse to a Missouri Animal Control Association hotline. All reporters would be exempt from civil and criminal liability for good-faith reporting. Reporters would have to complete one hour of training on The Link between animal and human abuse and how to identify and report suspected abuse.

## NEBRASKA

**LB 172** would expand the definition of child pornography, which includes exposing children to online acts of bestiality, to include computer- or AI-generated visual imagery.

**LB 753** would allow courts hearing requests for domestic violence protection orders, which include protections for and possession of pets, to allow existence of military protection orders issued against members of the armed forces to be offered as evidence of the respondent's past conduct and the need for a protection order.

**LB 876, the Immediate Protection from Abuse Act**, would allow law enforcement officers to issue an Immediate Protective Order against a restrained person whom the officer has reasonable grounds to believe poses a threat of harm against the victim or family or household member. The order would require the restrained person to relinquish sole possession of pets to the victim or household/family member and to be prohibited from coming into contact with, harming or killing the animals.

**LB 1000** would increase penalties for repeated violations of domestic violence protection orders, which include protections for and possession of pets.

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

**HB 1438** would require mental health caseworkers to report instances of animal abuse by their clients, to law enforcement or the NH SPCA. Reporters would not face monetary liability or cause of action for reports made in good faith.

**HB 1522** would expand the definition of domestic violence abuse (which already includes acts of animal cruelty) to add "coercive control" which would include acts intended to threaten, intimidate, harass, isolate, coerce, control, or compel compliance of a petitioner to reasonably fear for their physical safety, consisting of harming, or threatening or attempting to harm, a petitioner's child, relative, or animal.

## NEW JERSEY

**A 369** and **S 1916** 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.

**A814** 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 1951** and **S 405** 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 3809** and **S 1150** 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.

**S 2974** would require the Attorney General and the Administrative Director of the Courts to add training about recognizing the indicators of coercive control to existing domestic violence training requirements for law enforcement officers, judges and court personnel. Under New Jersey law, threatening to harm or kill an individual's pet is defined as an indicator of coercive control by an abuser.

## 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 care 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.

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

**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**, **A 1885** and **S 5895** 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 memo describing 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 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.

**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 4899** and **S 2280** would require law enforcement officers to conduct a lethality assessment as part of the standardized domestic incident report form. One question to be asked on the assessment form would be "Did they ever threaten to kill you, your children, or your pets?"

**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 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.

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



**S 8927** would direct courts considering the awarding of possession of a companion animal in a divorce settlement to include: whether the animal was acquired before or during the marriage; which party generally provides the animal with veterinary care, social interaction and compliance with regulations; and which party has the greater ability to financially support 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.

## 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.

**HB 2018** would allow Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board investigators to access and review records of reports to local animal control agencies.

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

**SB 906** would have the Department of Labor and Industry establish a Family and Medical Leave Fund allowing employees to take paid leave for a qualifying act of violence. These would include “abuse of a vulnerable adult”, which would include an act of violence against that person’s service or emotional support animal.

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## RHODE ISLAND

**HB 7133** would extend provisions for including household pets in protection orders to also allow courts to award plaintiffs custody of the animals and grant a restraining order or other injunctive relief if necessary.

**HB 7194** would add crimes against companion animals to the definition of domestic violence under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act.

## SOUTH CAROLINA

**H 4123, the Protection of Minors from Pornography and Obscenities Act**, would close a loophole and make it illegal to expose children to sexual activity, which includes bestiality, that is present in only part of materials. Currently, such acts must comprise the totality of the materials.

## SOUTH DAKOTA

**SB 81** would clarify the definition of the crime of harming a service animal belonging to a person with a disability to remove the requirement that the animal be in its harness at the time of the injury.

## UTAH

**HB 23** would increase the penalty for injuring, harassing or endangering a service animal from a misdemeanor to a felony.

**HB 341** would make it a misdemeanor to allow a minor under age 18 to attend a dogfight or a cock fight.

**SB 72** would: create a new definition and standalone criminal offense of “obscene animal abuse material”; separate animal sexual abuse from the current definition of pornography; add animal crushing to the offense of distributing obscene animal abuse material; and ensure that obscene animal abuse material is treated throughout the code as pornographic materials.

**SB 102** would add animal control officers to the list of professionals designated as first responders.

**SB 115** would require animal control officers to report suspected child maltreatment to the Division of Child and Family Services if: there is a child in the home with the alleged abused or neglected animal; a child safety concern is observed during the animal abuse investigation; or if the officer takes “serious enforcement action” in a home with a child. All animal cruelty convictions would be reported quarterly to DCFS to determine if the conviction warrants a child abuse investigation. DCFS caseworkers investigating alleged child abuse or neglect would be permitted to report a concern of animal abuse or neglect to local animal control or law enforcement authorities. Veterinarians, who are already permitted to report suspected animal abuse, would be protected from an employer’s prohibiting such reports or penalizing the veterinarian making the report.

## VERMONT

**H.492** would introduce “coercive control” into the animal cruelty context. Individuals who commit or threaten animal cruelty in order to influence a victim of domestic abuse would face additional penalties.

**H.578** would add engaging in sexual conduct with an animal in the presence of a minor or in which a minor is a participant to the crime of aggravated animal cruelty

## VIRGINIA

**HB 208** would add a new procedure for issuing “anti-harassment” orders to existing provisions that already include granting possession of pets in protective orders. The anti-harassment order would protect the petitioner, family and household members and could include granting the petitioner possession of any companion animal.

**HB 266** would create a new centralized system for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect, whereby reports would go to the state Department of Social Services rather than local departments. Virginia animal control officers are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect with immunity from civil and criminal liability for reporting in good faith.

**HB 901** would allow courts to issue an emergency substantial risk order against individuals believed to pose a substantial risk of personal injury to himself or others. The order would include a ban on possessing firearms. Evidence courts could consider in issuing the order could include “any recent act of violence, force or threat by the subject of the petition toward an animal.”

## WEST VIRGINIA

**HB 4130** would establish a new crime of hoarding of animals. Offenders would face misdemeanor fines of up to \$500 and risk having their animals turned over to an animal shelter for proper care and relocation.

**HB 4412** would establish liability for publishers and distributors of sexual material harmful to minors, including “patently and sexually offensive” materials including bestiality.

**SB 192** and **SB 688** would create a new misdemeanor crime of Assault Upon a Service Animal and subject the offender to making financial restitution for costs.

**SB 714** would allow the Board of Veterinary Medicine to punish or suspend the license of veterinarians and technicians to practice upon conviction for acts of cruelty, abuse or sexual abuse to an animal or human.

## CANADA

### Bill C-16, the Protecting Victims

**Act**, would criminalize images of animal sexual abuse and the use of animals as tools of coercive control in intimate partner violence.

**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.



Please [click here](#) to make a tax-deductible donation to help keep The LINK-Letter's news, trainings, and information flowing freely.

Your gift helps us protect vulnerable people and animals from violence, abuse and neglect.

Thank you for caring!

## 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.

## LINK TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

**Feb. 12 — Sylva, N. Car.:** RedRover and Greater Good Charities will conduct a [workshop](#) on "Housing People and Pets in Crisis."

**Feb. 17 — Dunadry, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, U.K.:** Paula Boyden, David Martin, Rebecca Stephens, and Andrea Lynch of The Links Group UK will present a [Links Veterinary Training Initiative](#) in conjunction with the BSAVA.

**Feb. 17 — Las Vegas, Nev.:** Victim to Verdict will present "See Something, Say Something: The Veterinary Professional's Duty to Report Animal Cruelty", "From the Clinic to the Courtroom: The Veterinary Team's Role in Collaborative Responses to Animal Cruelty Cases", and "More than Too Many: Spotlight on Animal Hoarding Case" at the [Western Veterinary Conference](#).

**Feb. 18 — Pennsylvania (online):** The [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

**Feb. 20 — London, U.K. (online):** The Links Group UK will present a [webinar](#), "Animal Abuse as a Strategy of Coercive Control: Safeguarding People and Animals."

**Feb. 23 — Cincinnati, 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. 24 — Kansas City, Mo. (online):** BestyBnB will present a [webinar](#), "Pet-Inclusive Safety Planning for Survivors of Domestic Violence featuring Kate Rachiele of Willow Center."

**Feb. 26 — Columbus, Ohio:** The [Midwest Veterinary Conference](#) will feature six Link workshops. Kris Otteman, Emily Lewis and Linda Fielder will present "From Clinic to Courtroom: Collaborative Responses to Animal Cruelty Cases," "See Something, Say Something: Our Duty to Report Animal Cruelty," and "Deadliest Match: A Case Study on Intimate Partner and Pet Abuse." Matt Pepper will present "Partnering with Human Services Organizations." Aviva Vincent will present "Recognizing 'The Link' between Interpersonal Violence and Animal Abuse" and "Mandated Reporting of Suspected Animal Abuse: How, to Whom, and What's Next."

**March 2 — 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 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Institute on Violence, Abuse and Trauma [International Summit](#).

**March 3 — Orlando, Fla.:** Phil Arkow will present "Bridging the Animal Rights/Welfare/Control Gap by Focusing on The Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence" at the [Florida Animal Protection Conference](#).

**March 4 — Elyria, 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 5 — Wilmore, Ky.:** The [inaugural meeting](#) of the Kentucky Human-Animal Welfare Coalition will meet at Asbury University, featuring representatives from law enforcement, animal care and control, and veterinary social work.

**March 18 — Sacramento, Calif.:** RedRover and Greater Good Charities will conduct a [workshop](#) on "Housing People and Pets in Crisis."

**March 19 — 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](#).



# LINK TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

**March 24 — Edinburgh, Scotland:** The Links Group UK will conduct its [Links Veterinary Training Initiative](#).

**March 24 — Ridgewood, N.Y. (online):** Phil Arkow will present “Protecting ‘Woman’s Best Friend’ and the Homeless through Pet-Inclusive Protection Orders” at My Dog Is My Home’s [Annual Conference](#).

**March 25 -- 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— Alexandria, Va. (online):** Phil Arkow will present “‘It’s Either You or the Dog!’ The Increased Risks of Animal Abuse and Other Family Violence in Military Families” in a [webinar](#) for the National Organization for Victim Advocacy’s DoD Domestic Abuse Advocate Training Program.

**March 26 — Sacramento, Calif. (online):** Kathleen Wood and Emily Lewis will present a webinar on “Protecting All Victims: How the Law Addresses Animal Abuse, Family Safety, and Professional Reporting,” in a [webinar](#) for DontForgetThePets.org.

**March 26 — 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 Clearing-house](#) webinar.

**April 15 — Pennsylvania (online):** The [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

**April 30 — 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 — 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 — Orlando, Fla.:** Jessica Rock and other speakers will present at the International Society for Animal Forensic Sciences’ [2026 Animal ForensiCon](#).

**May 12-15 — Banff, Alta., Canada:** The International Veterinary Forensic Sciences Association will hold its [19<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference](#).





## LINK TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

**May 18-19,— Washington, D.C.:** The National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges will conduct the 3<sup>rd</sup> [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.

**May 18-21 — Dallas, Texas:** Claire Coughlin and Nancy Blaney will present “Getting Everyone to Safety: Animal Abuse & Interpersonal Violence” at the [2026 Conference on Crimes Against Women](#).

**June 8-9 — Austin, Texas:** Phil Arkow will present on The Link at a [conference](#) of central Texas Children’s Advocacy Centers.

**June 17— Pennsylvania (online):** The [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

**Aug. 19 — 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— Pennsylvania (online):** The [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

**Sept. 1 — 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. 6 — Red Lodge, Mont. (online):** Phil Arkow will highlight Link issues in rural areas in a webinar for [Domestic and Sexual Violence Services](#).

**Oct. 14-16— Toronto, Ont., Canada:** The International Association of Veterinary Social Work will hold its [9<sup>th</sup> Summit](#).

**Oct. 21— Pennsylvania (online):** The [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

**Nov. 6 — Raleigh, N. Car.:** Phil Arkow will present “Another One Health Role for Veterinarians: Responding to Animal Cruelty and Other Family Violence” at the [North Carolina Veterinary Conference](#).

**Nov. 25 — London, U.K.:** Phil Arkow will speak at The Links Group UK’s [25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration](#) inaugurating 16 Days of Activism 2026.

**Dec. 16 — Pennsylvania (online):** The [Keystone Link Coalition](#) will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.



### *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.

## THE LINK... in the NEWS (as if we need more proof...)

### Pennsylvania Man Accused of Choking Mother's Cat to Death

**G**iovanni Adri Tortorici, 20, of Dover Twp., Penna., was charged with felony animal cruelty for allegedly strangling his mother's cat to death while she was away on vacation in California. The [York Dispatch](#) reported that the mother called York County police officials after another family member discovered the cat's body. The mother felt something was wrong after her son told her the cat had run away. The woman's daughter took a dog, which was not harmed, and the cat's body home, and later had it taken to the Animal Diagnostic Lab at Penn State University for a necropsy. Tortorici was released from prison after posting \$10,000 bail.



### Animal Hoarder Charged with Child Sexual Abuse After Skeletal Remains of Missing Father Found

**A**n animal welfare investigation that landed David Howery, 67, of McCracken County, Ky. in jail last April on 32 counts of animal cruelty after 32 dogs were rescued from deplorable conditions led to a further investigation that found human skeletal remains believed to be those of his father, who has been missing for years, and child sexual abuse material on his phone.

[WPSD-TV](#) reported that the remains were found as detectives following up on the animal cruelty charges uncovered information that suggested possible financial irregularities and benefits fraud. During the course of the forensic investigation, detectives also located child sexual abuse material on Howery's phone, the McCracken County Sheriff's Office said.



While in the county jail, Howery was charged with Possession of Matter Portraying a Sexual Performance by a Minor, Abuse of a Corpse, and Failure to Notify of a Death. During the investigation, detectives learned that Howery's father, Dillard Howery, may have been missing since 2015.

### Ohio Pair Charged with Child and Animal Sexual Abuse

**P**rosecutors in Warren County, Ohio charged Tony McCollister, 43, of South Lebanon, with pandering obscenity involving a minor and sexual conduct with two different dogs for allegedly uploading images to his Google account. [WLWT-TV](#) reported that McCollister was known in the community for having starred in an A&E reality TV show, "Neighbors with Benefits," which was quickly cancelled after only two episodes in 2015 that documented the lives of three local swinger couples. McCollister was arraigned and had a bond set at \$250,000 and was ordered to not have any contact with children or pets. Erica Grove, whose address was listed as the same as McCollister's, was also charged with sexual conduct with an animal.

### Florida Couple Charged with Child and Animal Sexual Abuse

**J**ordan Hoffman, 33, was charged by Lake City, Fla. police with 57 counts including 14 counts of possession of child pornography, six counts of promoting a child's sexual performance, and 35 counts of sexual activities involving animals. [First Coast News](#) reported that Hoffman, a firefighter, was investigated following a cybertip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The investigation uncovered evidence allegedly implicating his wife, Harleigh Hoffman, 27, who was charged with five counts of possessing child pornography and eight counts of unlawful sexual activities involving animals.



## THE LINK... in the NEWS (as if we need more proof...)

### *Two Unrelated Cases in Warren, Ohio Demonstrate the Depths of The Link...*

#### Children and Pets Rescued from Deplorable Residence

**P**olice in Warren, Ohio rescued four children, a dog and a snake from what they called “extremely unsanitary and hazardous conditions” and filed multiple charges against the couple.

[WKBN-TV](#) reported that police responding to a disturbance heard a woman screaming and yelling and children crying. The woman, Tiffany Feezle, who said she was disciplining a child, initially refused police entry into the home where they found three small children and a teenager.

Police found deplorable conditions including: every door torn off its hinges; walls with numerous holes and exposed wiring; electrical outlets ripped from the walls; floors covered in old food, feces, urine, food containers, and children’s clothes; holes in the flooring through which the basement was visible; sewage draining across the basement floor mixed with dog and cat feces; and feces in the bathtub mixed with clothing.

The only edible food was old chicken wings in the refrigerator and a frozen turkey in the freezer, according to police reports. The children, two of whom wore only diapers and no shoes or socks, were sleeping on mattresses on the floor. Cats were roaming freely through the home.

Feezle was charged with child endangering, domestic violence and obstructing official business. Her husband, Gerald Lofton III, was also arrested and charged with child endangering. It was unclear whether animal cruelty charges were filed or if the Humane Agent took custody of the animals. The children were turned over to Children Services.



#### Couple Charged with Child Rape and Animal Sex Abuse

**S**hawna Mayfield, 28, also of Warren, pleaded guilty to eight counts of rape, five counts of pandering sexually oriented matter involving a minor, one count of child endangering, and one count of sexual conduct with an animal as part of a plea deal

in which she must testify against her husband. The [Warren Tribune Chronicle](#) reported that her husband, Justin Mayfield, 37, who has a criminal history of violent offenses, was charged with 12 felony counts of rape, disseminating materials harmful to juveniles, and child endangerment.

Prosecutors called the case egregious with a “mountain of evidence” including statements from others and text messages where the couple allegedly boasted about abusing children and bragged about trading child abuse videos. Prosecutors said they had videos showing Shawna Mayfield engaging in sexual acts with a 4-year-old child and both Mayfields forcing another child to engage in adult behavior. The abused children ranged in age from 3 to 7. Investigators also found an illegal marijuana-growing operation in the basement and large quantities of marijuana in the house, authorities said.

Even with the plea agreement, Shawna Mayfield is facing a prison sentence of 30 years to life, while Justin Mayfield is facing 50 years to life.



## THE LINK... in the NEWS

### Parents Charged with Child & Animal Abuse After Teen and Dogs Left Alone for Months

**A**fter employees of a Dollar General store saw a 14-year-old girl stumbling dizzily along the road, Mobile County, Ala. Sheriff's investigators arrested her mother, Marchelle Lynn Pertilla, and stepfather, Eugene Medrano, after they found the girl had been living alone for nearly a year in a trailer filled with urine, feces, roaches and trash.



Pertilla and Medrano were charged with child abuse and animal cruelty after investigators reportedly found six living dogs and one dead dog on the property. The girl told authorities the parents had moved to Pensacola, Fla. and had left her alone with the animals because she refused to leave her service animal. [KOLD-TV](#) reported it was not clear whether any of the dogs qualify as service animals. The teen said she communicated with her parents through Snapchat and that her mother would send food through DoorDash or Walmart deliveries.

Detectives also reported finding the teen's handwritten note titled, *"How many times mom tells me that she can't pick me up!"* that appeared to include 87 tally marks.

The surviving dogs were transported to Prichard Animal Control and the girl was taken to a hospital for medical treatment.

### Ex-cop Charged with Poisoning His Ex-Girlfriend's Dog

**F**ormer Bartow, Fla. police officer Edwin Campuzano, 22, turned himself in to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office where he was charged with aggravated animal cruelty for allegedly poisoning his ex-girlfriend's dog. [WKRC-TV](#) reported that Campuzano was charged with giving rat poison to "Milo," a 3-year-old Maltese poodle, while the woman was out of town. She told authorities that he had expressed a dislike for the dog who "died a painful death and he died alone." Sheriff Chad Chronister said those who wear — or wore — a badge should be held to a higher standard. "This innocent animal deserved care and protection, and the trust placed in him as a partner makes this loss all the more senseless."



### Cockfighting Bust Nabs Six on Animal Cruelty and Narcotics Charges

**F**orsyth County, N.C. Sheriff's deputies responding to an animal welfare check in Winston-Salem recovered 400 roosters, a kilo of cocaine, guns, an undisclosed amount of cash, and arrested six people. The [Charlotte Observer](#) reported that the raid busted one of the largest cockfighting rings in state history. Edward Thomas Marin, 29, of Winston-Salem, was arrested on felony charges of possession and trafficking of cocaine, weapon possession by a felon, drug paraphernalia possession, and cockfighting. Also arrested on felony cockfighting charges were Winston-Salem residents Joxin Trinidadvargas, 25, Filogonio Garcia Gonzalez, 71, Mike Allen Lopez-noyola, 25, Jose Raul Cruzavila, 46, and a minor.



### Boyfriend Charged with Allegedly Throwing Woman's Cat Against a Wall

**A**fter getting into an argument with his girlfriend about her attending a party in a male friend's hotel room, Angel Ventura Ayala, 27, of Henderson, Nev., allegedly threw her cat against a wall and sent her a video of the incident. [KVVU-TV](#) reported that Henderson police arrested Ayala on felony charges of animal abuse. The cat was treated for minor injuries at a local animal hospital.



## 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.

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