



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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LAW ENFORCEMENT... and THE LINK

Congress Re-Introduces the AVERT Act

Hoping that the third time is the charm, the **AVERT Act** -- the “**Animal Violence Exposes Real Threat of Future Violence Act of 2026**” -- has been re-introduced in Congress as **H.R. 8911** and **S. 4562**. The measure, which failed to pass in 2022 and 2024 (*See the [April 2024 LINK-Letter](#)*) has the potential to be a game-changer in expanding federal recognition of The Link.



Rep. Dina Titus
three years

H.R. 8911, sponsored by Rep. Dina Titus (D – Nevada) and **S. 4562**, sponsored by Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.) would require the Department of Justice to conduct a study into the Link between cruelty towards animals and cruelty towards humans and report its findings and recommendations to Congress within



Sen. Gary Peters

The bills would earmark \$2 million in funding for mental health service providers, police, and animal welfare organizations to prevent animal cruelty and rehabilitate offenders. Titus and Peters co-sponsored the bills in 2024. Each bill already has several Republican co-sponsors.

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LAW ENFORCEMENT... and THE LINK

Congress Re-Introduces the AVERT Act

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“Animal abusers have a significantly higher likelihood of committing acts of interpersonal violence,” said Titus. “Despite this, animal abuse continues to be treated as an isolated act rather than an indicator of violent behavior. By collecting data to study the Link between animal and domestic abuse, we will be able to make informed legislative decisions that improve public safety, decrease incidents of domestic violence, and protect animals.”

“There is a clear connection between animal abuse and interpersonal violence, but more research is needed to help our communities effectively prevent and respond to red flags when we see them,” said Peters. “This commonsense, bipar-

tisan bill would improve our understanding of how a history of animal abuse can lead to future violence, while directing needed federal resources to the local partners who work to protect our communities each and every day.”



Rep. Vern Buchanan violence against people,” said co-sponsor Rep. Vern Buchanan (R – Fla.). “In fact, studies have shown that nearly 40 percent of known animal abusers commit crimes against humans as well. I’m pleased to lead efforts

with Congresswoman Titus to study the troubling connection between domestic abusers and animal violence.”



Sen. Thom Tillis they deserve,” said co-sponsoring Sen. Thom Tillis (R – N. Car.). “This bipartisan legislation will help law enforcement, mental health professionals, and local communities better identify threats early, intervene effectively, and prevent future acts of violence before they happen.”

FBI Cites Animal Cruelty as Warning Sign for Online Violent Extremism

The FBI’s Boston field office on Feb. 19 published an [“Open Letter to Parents, Guardians and Caregivers”](#) that featured a list of warning signs – including acts of animal cruelty -- that children might be victimized by online criminal networks.

Presented as a community commitment to the safety and security of children, the Open Letter expressed concerns about a sharp increase in violent online networks that manipulate and induce children into producing and sharing child sexual abuse material or engaging in acts of animal cruelty, self-harm or violence. The FBI called these practices, Sadistic Online Exploitation and Nihilistic Violent Extremism, intimidation tactics that “coerce victims into performing increasingly degrading and violent acts.”

The FBI is investigating over 350 subjects nationwide who are tied to these violent online networks, and all 56 FBI field offices across the country are involved in



these investigations. Perpetrators often groom victims by first establishing a trusting or romantic relationship before eventually manipulating and coercing them into engaging in escalating harmful behavior designed to shame and isolate them.

Members of these networks connect with children and other at-risk individuals online through mobile messaging apps, social media and gaming platforms. They want to sow chaos and facilitate the destruction of society. Many of them may be engaging in criminal activity for sexual gratification, social status, a sense of belonging, or other reasons.

“The threats our children face online are real and growing. But with awareness, vigilance and cooperation, we can stop these predators before they cause harm. Your role is critical. By staying informed and engaged, you become the first line of defense in protecting our children,” FBI Special Agent in Charge Ted E. Docks concluded.

LAW ENFORCEMENT... and THE LINK

Dogfighting Linked with Human and Narcotics Trafficking

When we think about The Link, we tend to focus on animal cruelty and family violence. But another intersectionality occurs on community and national levels: the crossroads where dogfighting is part of criminal networks that involve narcotics and human trafficking.

That was the guidance offered by Bill Loucks, a veteran of the Nashville Metro Police Department's narcotics, gang and human trafficking units and now an instructor with the North Carolina Justice Academy. Presenting "The Intersectionality of Drugs, Dog Fighting, and Human Trafficking" at a [Justice Clearinghouse](#) webinar, Loucks encouraged law enforcement and humane officers to look beyond the initial crime they've been called out to investigate to recognize that multiple crimes often intersect.

Drugs, dog fighting, and human trafficking may seem like separate crimes, but they often intersect through the same criminal networks, Loucks explained. From traditional street gangs to transnational Asian and Latin criminal enterprises and Eastern European mafia groups, these networks profit from multiple illegal markets operating side by side.

Regrettably, he said, most police and prosecutors have not had training on the criminal ramifications of dogfighting, a felony in all 50 states, that is frequently part of a criminal intersectionality involving multiple overlapping crimes. One investigation can uncover evidence of another crime and can more effectively identify, report,



Bill Loucks

and disrupt interconnected crimes involving exploited human and animal victims.

"As cops we're not trained to look from the animal side as an actual crime," he said. But when law enforcement disrupts a dogfighting ring they may not only rescue dozens of animals they may also uncover drug and human trafficking, money laundering, gang activity, conspiracies, illegal gambling, and alcohol violations.

"Dogfighting and human trafficking mirror each other," he explained. Humans and animals are vulnerable victims bought, traded, sold, and exploited for criminal purposes, whether for sex or for labor. They're expendable, totally under the control of the trafficker, trained and manipulated, have no choice, and are embedded in networks that are incredibly hard to penetrate without extensive undercover operations.

And both human and animal trafficking are "all about the money." Human trafficking is exceedingly lucrative for cartels that can make \$4,000 — \$21,000 for each

individual they smuggle into the U.S. "This creates a debt bondage where the victim owes a debt to someone in a foreign land so they wind up in a sex or labor operation." Drugs and human trafficking are the top two generators of illicit money in the U.S.; cartels make \$68 billion a year doing it.

Similarly, money is the driver of dogfighting enterprises.

"Dogfighting is a money-generating crime," he said, explaining how fighters can make \$30,000 - \$150,000 per fight plus fees from breeding their animals. "Show me a dogfighting operation where drugs or money have not been recovered," he said. "Show me a dogfight where an instrument of force — a gun or a knife — wasn't found. The number one reason people get into dogfighting is the money. From a business perspective it's a no-brainer: the logistics and routes are already established and controlled. These revenue streams are interconnected — follow the money."

He encouraged investigators to not fixate on just the one crime they've been called out on. For example, police investigating a drug crime assume pitbulls on heavy chains where they can't come into direct contact with each other are just guard dogs.

They don't notice the dogs' heavily scarred faces. They don't realize they're potentially looking at a dogfighting operation which is also a crime and an element of the crime scene they're already working.

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LAW ENFORCEMENT... and THE LINK

Dogfighting Linked with Human and Narcotics Trafficking

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They fail to include animal control in their operational assessment. They don't realize the dogs are potential evidence and another opportunity to put a bad actor in jail. Search warrants often don't include the dogs or fighting paraphernalia – treadmills, steroids, medications, fighting rings.

“Show me a dog-fighting operation where drugs or money have not been recovered.”

— Bill Loucks

ing at a drug or human trafficking or money laundering operation.

Similarly, animal control investigators don't realize they're probably also look-

Loucks presented signs of human trafficking and dogfighting to look for at crime scenes. Above all, he concluded, be aware that there is probably much more going on than your initial impression. “Simply put, we are there while the victims need help and we don't know it!”

Louisiana Makes it Easier for Sexual Abuse Victims to Testify

The utilization of facility dogs to make it easier for victims to confront their abusers and testify in court got a boost in Louisiana in June when Gov. Jeff Landry signed **HB 126** into law. The new provisions, which take effect August 1 as Act 616, expand the ability of facility dogs to accompany witnesses into courtrooms to now also include witnesses in a trial for a sex offense.

The measure was sponsored by Rep. Mandie Landry (D -New Orleans). Previously, facility dogs were allowed only for witnesses who were juveniles or developmentally disabled.

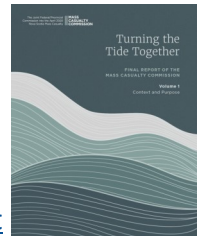


As is common in other states, the Louisiana statute guarantees that to ensure that the presence of a facility dog does not influence the jury or is not a reflection on the truthfulness of any testimony that is offered by the victim or witness, the court may order that the presence of the dog be obscured from the jury at all times.

The court may also instruct the jury on the role of the facility dog on the court's own motion or upon request of either party. The court shall ensure that the facility dog is a trained animal. The facility dog's entry into and exit from the courtroom will be done outside the presence of the jury and all precautions should be taken to obscure the presence of the dog from the jury.

Canadian Mass Shooting Report Acknowledged The Link

After the deadliest mass shooting in Canadian history in Portapique, Nova Scotia resulted in 22 deaths, a Mass Casualty Commission investigated the event. The Commission's [Final Report](#) revealed that earlier intimate partner violence and threats to her animals by the perpetrator, Gabriel Wortman, had raised many red flags. She had sought help from police regarding violence in the home, reporting Wortman “had threatened her child, was drinking heavily, and threatened to kill her animals.”



In 2023 the Commission made 130 recommendations. The first urged organizations that collect violence-related data or develop policy to collect information about histories of violence, including “whether the perpetrator had a history of harming or killing pets or animals, or threatening to do so.” They also recommended development of a common IPV risk analysis framework “to assist women to develop and carry out effective safety plans for themselves, their children, and other dependents (family members, pets, and livestock).”

-- The Joint Federal/Provincial Commission into the April 2020 Nova Scotia Mass Casualty (2023). *Final Report – Turning the Tide Together*. Ottawa: Privé Council. <https://masscasualtycommission.ca/final-report/>



Failure to Investigate Cruelty Serves to Legitimize Animal Abuse

A researcher in Mexico has reached a conclusion similar to frustrations expressed by many in the United States – that the lack of formal investigations of serious animal cruelty cases hampers the chances of successful prosecutions. The study cites Link evidence as enhancing the need for such criminal prosecutions, adding that the failure to investigate and prosecute fosters the normalization of violence against animals and the legitimization of abuse.

Angélica María Hernández-Ramírez at the University of Veracruz reviewed 1,965 formal complaints of active maltreatment and passive neglect that were received by authorities in the capital city of Xalapa in 2019. But the failure to formalize the investigation of complaints prevented 1,053 cases of animal abuse from reaching the judicial system, thereby resulting in a lack of justice and fostering impunity regarding this type of abuse. No case was recognized as a crime and subject to administrative or criminal sanction.

She cited “naturalization” and attention diversion as fostering officials’ resistance to enforcing the anti-cruelty law, which resulted in legitimizing animal abuse. She said the research highlights a high level of corruption and impunity regarding perpetrated violence due to the procedural apparatus of the responsible authority. She argued that there is a need to broaden the scope of study and analysis regarding how various types of violence are managed and accounted for by the authorities in order to achieve the full rule of law in the state.



She observed that in Mexico, as elsewhere, the study of animal cruelty has revealed that animal abuse and torture are linked to an escalating series of criminal acts and cycles of interpersonal and domestic violence. She called animal abuse a widely recognized public issue that impacts public health, can be studied through criminological and veterinary forensic science frameworks, and highlights challenges in the administration of justice. She emphasized the role of authorities in providing the necessary evidence to help legally classify animal abuse as a crime in Mexico as is widely the case internationally.

She cited a 2020 survey by Andrea Herbert Garrido, also conducted in Xalapa, of 80 men and women belonging to domestic violence support groups. Similar to multiple studies in other countries, participants noted the presence of threats and acts of physical and/or psychological ill-treatment of their pets. 40% said their animal was

beaten by the aggressor. 20% reported that concern for their pet's well-being was an impediment to leaving the home they shared with the abuser. 15% indicated that their children observed animal abuse.

-- Hernández-Ramírez, A.M. (2025). *Des-enmascarando la violencia: análisis empírico-discursivo del aparato procedimental vinculado al maltrato animal*. [Un-masking violence: an empirical-discursive analysis of the procedural apparatus linked to animal abuse.] [In Spanish]. *Iztapalapa Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades*, 46(99), 141-167. doi: <https://doi.org/10.24275/revizt.a46n99.07>

-- Garrido, A. H. (2020). *Maltrato animal: las víctimas ocultas de la violencia doméstica*. [Animal abuse: The hidden victims of domestic violence.] [In Spanish]. *Derecho Animal (Forum of Animal Law Studies)*, (11). <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/da.471>



Veterinary Students Consistently Rate Cruelty and Abuse as High Priority

A study examining veterinary students' attitudes to 12 dog welfare issues is reporting that students consistently rate obvious and severe problems, such as abuse or active cruelty, lack of treatment, and malnutrition, as highly important. It describes the professional responsibility of veterinarians to identify and respond to animal abuse and situates welfare perception and introduction into the curriculum within a broader ethical and public health framework, where recognition of subtle or ambiguous cases becomes essential. The study supports the view that veterinary education should extend beyond the transmission of welfare science knowledge to also incorporate structured opportunities for reflection, case-based learning, and engagement with ethical dilemmas.

The study, led by Luis Alberto Henríquez Hernández and colleagues, is an offshoot of an earlier examination of veterinary students' attitudes in Spain's Canary Islands (*See the November 2025 LINK-Letter*). It evaluated 157 ninth-semester veterinary students (119 women, 38 men) across six academic years. Students rated 12 common dog welfare issues with a 5-point Likert scale:



Dr. Henríquez Hernández

- (1) Obesity, (2) Chronic pain or poor mobility, (3) Breed-related conditions, (4) Behavioral problems, (5) Lack of treatment, including euthanasia, to prevent suffering, (6) Lack of sufficient exercise or space, (7) Lack of mental stimulation, (8) Lack of routine preventive veterinary care, (9) Abuse or active cruelty, (10) Malnutrition, (11) Lack of sufficient company, and (12) Lack of shelter.

The highest-rated item was abuse or active cruelty. More complex or socially normalized conditions, including breed-related disorders and behavioral problems, were assigned lower importance.

"Animal welfare is widely recognized as a complex and multidimensional construct that extends beyond the mere absence of disease or overt suffering, encompassing physical health, mental states, behavior, and environmental conditions," the authors write. "Within this framework, the perception of welfare issues cannot be understood solely as a reflection of objective knowledge. Rather, it is shaped by a combination of

cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors, including personal values, prior experiences, and social norms."

The study corroborates earlier studies that have identified greater sensitivity of female students toward animal welfare. Its findings have broader implications for understanding the development of ethical decision-making by veterinary professionals.

"The consistent prioritization of issues such as abuse or active cruelty, lack of treatment to prevent suffering, and malnutrition indicates that veterinary curricula effectively convey the ethical imperatives related to overt dog suffering," they conclude.



— Henríquez-Hernández, L. A., Martín-Cruz, B., Luzardo, O. P., & Zumbado, M. (2026). Perception of Dog Welfare in Veterinary Students: A Six-Year Study of Ethical Priorities, Cohort Variation, and Influencing Factors. *Animals*, 16(9), 1385. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani16091385>

Delaware Considers Mandated Reporting

Delaware has become the latest state to propose legislation that would mandate veterinarians to report suspected animal abuse and neglect, with immunity from civil and criminal liability.



Rep. Krista Griffith

HB 415 was introduced on May 12 by Rep. Krista Griffith (D — Wilmington) with eight co-sponsors in the House and Senate.

The law would require veterinarians to report suspected abuse or neglect of animals to the Office of Animal Welfare or other appropriate authority, with confidentiality assured and with immunity from civil and criminal liability for reporting in good faith. They would need to complete training on the subject in order to retain their licenses. Disciplinary sanctions could be imposed for failures to report.

Currently, 23 states mandate veterinarians to make such reports, and 20 other states permit them to do so.

Human DNA Seen As Forensic Aid in Animal Cruelty Investigations

The deliberate abuse of animals that “can then lead to other crimes against other animals or humans” and The Link between animal abuse and domestic violence were referenced in a new article from Australia describing the forensic use of human DNA detection in the investigation of non-accidental injuries in animal abuse cases.



Heidi Monkman

The article describes the common practice of human DNA identification to assist investigations in crimes against humans. It argues that companion animals can be vectors of human DNA transfer and, as such, this evidence could be helpful in helping prosecutors determine who may or may not have been involved in the harm of the animal.

The research found that animals’ anatomical regions that typically are exposed to low levels of human contact may be frequently touched during abusive incidents, thereby yielding informative data for evaluating potential actions taken by the perpetrator. Furthermore, an individual foreign to the household was detected in 53% of the samples, demonstrating that even brief, single contacts can lead to detectable DNA transfer.

Heidi Monkman and her colleagues, based at two universities and police forensic services, also point out that “Where the veterinarian is involved, research has shown that many are either not trained to diagnose abuse or will not diagnose abuse as it can come with responsibility and/ or a lack of ability to help the animal or the human victim. Non-accidental injuries in animals are not routinely prosecuted as a result and tend to have lower sentences compared to crimes where humans are victims.”



— Monkman, H., van Oorschot, R.A.H., & Go-ray, M. (2026). Human DNA detection and its use in investigations of non-accidental injuries in animal abuse cases. *Science & Justice*, 66(3), 101441. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scijus.2026.101441>

Veterinarians Have One Health Role in Abuse Investigations

The volume of animal cruelty reports to authorities highlights the social relevance of animal abuse and the community’s mobilization to report suspected violations of animal welfare. That’s the premise of a study that concludes that integrated public policies and active community engagement are essential to strengthening animal protection within the One Health perspective, and that veterinarians have a significant responsibility in this response.

The researchers analyzed animal mistreatment cases recorded by the Animal Protection Group in the Brazilian city of Goiânia in 2024. Although few arrests were made, there was significant operational demand, reflected in the number of police investigations and public service activities carried out.

They conclude that forensic veterinary medicine has evolved substantially due to an increase in litigation — claims for compensation filed by animal owners and/ or third parties — regarding animal deaths, health problems, and/or injuries caused by the animals. Consequently, veterinarians are needed from the beginning of a criminal investigation following the same forensic principles as in human forensics, sharing responsibilities and regarding animals as true victims.

It is the veterinarian’s responsibility to perform medical-scientific procedures, forensic examinations, and issue expert opinions regarding these crimes, they conclude, highlighting that animal abuse remains a significant challenge in Goiânia as reflected in the high volume of cases and reports handled. Integrating educational initiatives, enforcement and public policy is essential for preventing animal abuse, emphasizing that effective protection depends on societal engagement, the strengthening of legislation, and intersectoral action aligned with the One Health concept.



— De Lima, I.S., Santana, G.B., do Rosario, N.S., dos Santos, J.P., & Gomes, L.G., et al. (2026). Casos de maus-tratos a animais no Grupo de Proteção Animal de uma capital brasileira: implicações para a Saúde Única. [Cases of animal abuse in the Animal Protection Group of a Brazilian capital: implications for One Health]. [In Portuguese] *Scientific Electronic Archives*, 19(4), 1-6. <http://dx.doi.org/10.36560/19420262223>

VETERINARY MEDICINE... and THE LINK

The Link Helps to Drive Veterinary Forensics in The Netherlands

Describing interpersonal violence as a “significant public health and social concern with severe societal and individual consequences” with a well-documented and consistent association with animal abuse as an indicator of broader patterns of violence including domestic abuse, child abuse and other criminal behaviors, the first systematic study of veterinary forensic necropsies in the Netherlands is reporting a dominance of violent and neglect-related deaths in caseloads.

The study references The Link as a significant driver in the development of veterinary forensics in the Netherlands, similar to findings in Ukraine and Thailand (*See the April 2026 LINK-Letter*).

The five-year analysis of 346 veterinary forensic necropsies characterizes animal abuse cases by species, causes and manners of death, and regional, temporal, and procedural patterns. Blunt force trauma (30.3%) and neglect or deprivation (26.4%) were the most frequent causes.

Monique Verkerk and Thomas P. Shehata say the findings under-



Monique Verkerk, left, and Thomas P. Shehata

score the need for standardized protocols, interdisciplinary collaboration and institutional support for veterinary forensic science. “These findings emphasize the importance of veterinary forensic investigations not only for establishing cause and manner of death, but also for generating evidence that contributes to both legal proceedings and violence-prevention strategies,” they write.

“This study demonstrates the critical value of veterinary forensic necropsy in identifying, documenting, and understanding animal abuse. To fully realize its potential, the field requires sustainable funding, national guidelines for evidence handling, formal integration into investigative protocols,

and interdisciplinary training. Strengthening these elements will improve the legal impact of forensic findings, enhance animal welfare enforcement, and contribute to broader violence prevention and public safety efforts.”

The Link between interpersonal violence and animal abuse gained Dutch attention in 2009, when 60% of veterinarians reported observing signs of abuse in their practice. Later research further demonstrated domestic violence and animal abuse frequently co-existing, highlighting the need for early detection and documentation by veterinarians, social workers and law enforcement officers.



— Verkerk, M., & Shehata, T.P. (2026). Five years of veterinary forensic necropsies in the Netherlands: A retrospective analysis of non-human cases. *International Journal of Legal Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00414-026-03840-y>

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.

Veterinarians Can Be Key in Detecting Larger Underlying Problems

Noting that all forms of animal cruelty, including animal hoarding, should be taken into consideration “as they not only affect animal welfare but may also serve as indicators or predictors of human-directed violence,” researchers have published what may be the first report from Thailand about the use of veterinary forensics in a specific animal hoarding case.

The report describes a forensic investigation of a dog associated with animal hoarding and environmental neglect in Bangkok. Despite supportive treatment, the dog died

“An initial clinical presentation can reveal a larger underlying problem of environmental neglect.”

within 48 hours. A subsequent site inspection, conducted using the TRACE model and based on crime scene investigation principles, identified 13 dogs housed in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. An environmental assessment revealed poor sanitation, waste accumulation, and a high burden of infectious and vector-borne diseases.

They emphasize that veterinarians are on the frontline of detecting animal welfare issues when animals are presented for care and play an essential role in investigating potential concerns and establishing trust through physical examinations and laboratory findings. “To address these concerns, veterinary forensics has emerged

as an important field for investigating animal abuse and inadequate welfare management, as well as linking animal, human, and crime scene evidence,” they write.

“The case highlights how an initial clinical presentation can reveal a larger underlying problem of environmental neglect. It also emphasizes the importance of the early recognition and reporting of suspected animal cruelty in clinical practice, particularly within a multidisciplinary and veterinary forensic framework,” they continue.

Continued collaboration among veterinarians, forensic scientists, law enforcement personnel, animal welfare agencies, and mental health professionals may also contribute to more consistent identification, documentation and management of suspected animal welfare violations.

“This case demonstrates the value of integrating clinical veterinary findings with forensic investigation in the assessment of animal neglect,” they conclude. “The combined use of clinical, laboratory,

and environmental evidence strengthens documentation and supports potential legal action. Enhanced veterinary forensic training and standardized protocols are recommended to improve early detection and intervention in animal cruelty cases.”

The study is a follow-up to an earlier qualitative study that called for a more integrated and operational approach to addressing pet abuse and animal welfare that includes strengthening investigations and prosecutions through greater use of veterinary forensics, harmonized protocols, and coordinated efforts working within a One Welfare framework (*See the April 2026 LINK-Letter*).

— Lorisirigool, A., Kulnides, N., Pumipuntu, N., Sukumolanan, P., & Pumhirunroj, B. (2026). A case of animal hoarding and neglect in Bangkok, Thailand: Application of the TRACE model in veterinary forensic investigation. *Forensic Sciences*, 6(2), 53. <https://doi.org/10.3390/forensicsci6020053>



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

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

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

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... and THE LINK

Murder of Wife by Known Animal Abuser Prompts Call for Registry

After a British woman was brutally murdered in what prosecutors called a “twisted and barbaric attack” by her husband who had an extensive history of animal cruelty, her mother is campaigning for “Holly’s Law” in her daughter’s memory, to stop prolific animal abusers from being able to acquire more pets and to raise awareness of the Link between animal and domestic abuse.



Holly was 26 when she was killed

Annette Bramley told [The Guardian](#) that after Holly ended up in a controlling and abusive relationship, her husband, Nicholas Metson, was quick to use her

affection for animals against her. He bought Holly a puppy and then tried to kill it by putting it in a washing machine. After Holly rescued it, he drowned it in a bath. He went on to kill and abuse hamsters, rabbits and guinea pigs over the course of their seven-year relationship. Bramley said she thought he used the threat of animal abuse to force Holly to do what he wanted.

“I didn’t think he would stop at animals. I knew the connection between animal abuse and domestic abuse,” she said.

Metson killed Holly, then 26, in March 2023 and cut Holly’s body into more than 200 pieces. Metson had a long history of animal abuse from the age of 8. He had openly admitted strangling animals and was on the RSPCA’s radar but had never been prosecuted.

“He’d been harming animals for all these years. What can we do to stop that?” asked Bramley.

Citing Link statistics connecting pet and domestic abuse, Bramley is now campaigning for [Holly’s Law](#) which would establish an animal abuse registry in the UK and create a program to allow police to disclose information on animal abuse and neglect to prevent perpetrators acquiring more pets.

Holly’s Law would operate similar to the UK’s Clare’s Law, enabling the proactive disclosure of relevant information about a partner’s history of animal abuse. This would help individuals make more informed decisions within relationships. As with Clare’s Law, it would include relevant allegations that did not pro-

ceed to court as well as other safeguarding intelligence. All disclosures would be managed through safeguarding professionals, ensuring that the process remains controlled and confidential, avoiding the risks associated with informal sharing or vigilantism.



Campaign Links Domestic Violence with Crimes Against Wildlife

The campaign for Holly’s Law is being backed by the [Naturewatch Foundation](#), which is reporting unique data Linking domestic violence with harm to wildlife. An analysis by the UK’s national wildlife crime unit found a link to domestic violence and abuse among 27% of all wildlife crime offenders.

Mark Randell, campaigns manager at Naturewatch Foundation, said, “The whole concept of Holly’s Law is to be able to at least advise those safeguarding organizations where there is animal cruelty within a domestic abuse environment. Bearing in mind how many domestic abuse cases involve animal abuse, and the fact that 50%-60% of households in the country have a pet, it will make a real difference.”



Mark Randell

Randell added that he wants to see animal abuse taken more seriously in the conversation around misogyny and tackling violence against women and girls, arguing that it is a significantly overlooked risk factor.

“There’s an increasing number of young men, predominantly, who are using catapults and slingshots to harm wildlife. We’ve got to shift that culture. It’s about respect for women, but also respect for all living beings and the environment,” he said. “And if we’re talking about what’s being done in relation to online abuse of people, we’ve got to make sure it includes animals too.”



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... and THE LINK

Are Pet Protection Orders and Pet-Friendly Shelters “Policy Slippage”?

Canadian researchers who have been actively examining the issues surrounding co-sheltering pets in domestic violence shelters have uncovered an apparent paradox: laws which allow survivors to include pets in protection orders (PPOs) may actually result in “a form of policy slippage” in that jurisdictions with animal-inclusive protection orders are less likely to have access to co-sheltering, “which raises serious safety concerns.”



Amy Fitzgerald and Bridget Nicholls at the University of Windsor and their colleagues recognize programs and laws in both Canada

Amy Fitzgerald (left) & Bridget Nicholls

and the U.S. have emerged in response to evidence that pets' presence often results in victims delaying leaving, due in part to limited availability of programs to care for their animals. Shelters that accept companion animals and laws allowing them to be included in protection orders are two significant results of this increased awareness.

“The ability to include a companion animal in a protection order could be related to greater requests for services.”

— Fitzgerald, Nicholls et al.

have programs to care for pets, or if shelters are not screening for pets at intake or when engaging in safety planning, the legislative protections are not able to be realized, they write.

They conducted the study because whether the legislation governing PPOs and pet-safekeeping programs are related has not been examined. The extent that PPOs can offer some protection could be functionally inhibited depending on available resources. For example, if those who file for these orders live in jurisdictions where shelters do not

The study examines the practical value of PPO statutes by addressing three questions:

1. Is there a relationship between PPO statutes and shelter policies at the state/provincial level in the U.S. and Canada?
2. Are shelters in jurisdictions with PPO laws capable of accommodating animals included in protection orders?
3. Do shelters in these jurisdictions ask about animals at intake and/or do include them in safety planning?

702 shelters U.S. and Canadian shelters reported:

- Monthly calls to shelters requesting pet services averaged 6.62 in Canada and 11.4 in the U.S.
- 30% of shelters proactively asked survivors about their pets; 26% asked on a case-by-case basis.
- Shelters in states and provinces that explicitly include animals in protection orders receive more calls requesting services for pets.
- However, shelters in provinces with PPO statutes were more likely to not screen for pets; in the U.S. states without PPO laws were more likely to not screen for pets.
- In both the U.S. and Canada, survivors with pets are less likely to have access to on-site pet co-sheltering.

“It appears that the ability to include a companion animal in a protection order could be related to greater requests for services in both countries,” they conclude. However, they emphasize that it is possible that with time there will be increased awareness of the ability to include animals in these orders, which may drive increased future requests for pet programs at shelters.

They also see plenty of room for improvement as 38% of shelters in both countries reported never proactively screening survivors about pet concerns, and 50% do not routinely include pet questions. They caution that the study findings may be skewed because shelters that see pets as worthy of attention were probably more likely to participate in the study, so the proportion of all shelters that routinely screen for pets is likely to be even lower.

(Continued on Page 12)

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... and THE LINK

Are Pet Protection Orders and Pet-Friendly Shelters “Policy Slippage”?

(Continued from Page 11)

They argue that relying on frontline staff to ask about animals on a case-by-case basis in the absence of a standardized protocol places an unnecessary burden on staff and is limiting in relying on victims to volunteer that they are concerned about their animals. Many victims believe they should prioritize their own safety and that of their children and may fear being stigmatized for taking pets into consideration.

They criticize lawmakers who, when confronted with growing evidence of IPV being linked with animal abuse, enact PPOs as a law-and-order approach that is cheaper than funding pet-safekeeping programs.

They conclude that the disconnect between PPOs and pet-inclusive shelters is a paradox that “can be conceptualized as policy slippage; legislation is enacted, yet there are inadequate resources to meaningfully support it on the ground. Thus, although amendments to statutes to enable inclusion of companion animals are valuable, and no doubt can be a useful tool for protecting human and nonhuman lives, in practice they are limited if pet-safekeeping programs do not exist.”



— Fitzgerald, A., Nicholls, B., Barrett, B., Stevenson, R., Gray, A., et al. (2026). Companion animal protections in intimate partner violence programming: Is there a relationship to legislative developments? *Society & Animals*, 1-23. doi:10.1163/15685306-bja10288

Canada Expands Definition of Coercive-Control Animal Abuse

Canada’s Parliament took a major step forward in including animals as vulnerable victims in coercive and controlling behavior when the **Protecting Victims Act C-16** received Royal Assent by the Governor General on June 18. The new law adds dramatic new expansions to similar provisions in many U.S. states.

The first issue in the [205-page omnibus bill](#) is an amendment to the Criminal Code that creates a new offense that prohibits engaging in a pattern of coercive or controlling conduct towards an intimate partner. New section 264.01 creates an offense of engaging in “a pattern of coercive or controlling conduct” with intent to cause their intimate partner to believe that her or his safety is threatened.

“If I threatened to harm your mother’s dog, it could be as damaging to you as if I were to harm your dog.”

— **MP Anthony Housefather**

Of particular note is that such a pattern is defined as including using, attempting to use or threatening to use violence against any animal that is “known to” the intimate partner, or controlling or “attempting to control the manner in which” the intimate partner cares for any known animal.

This language represents a significant extension of similar provisions in many U.S. states which generally limit coercive threats to animals owned or controlled by the intimate partner. Our colleagues at Canada’s [Violence Link Coalition](#) inform us that Liberal



MP Anthony Housefather

MP Anthony Housefather brought up the amendment that addresses animals “known to” the intimate partner as vulnerable to being a subject of coercive control, rather than just something they own or they have control over. Housefather said, “If I threatened to harm your mother’s dog, it could be as damaging to you as if I were to harm your dog”.

Similarly, no laws in U.S. states are believed to specifically address attempting to control the manner in which the intimate partner cares for animals.

The new law adds two other Link-related provisions. It criminalizes the distribution of visual representations of bestiality, punishable by up to five years in prison. It also allows criminal and military courts to permit witnesses or victims of sexual crimes, criminal harassment or trafficking, or who are under age 18 or who have a mental or physical disability, to have a support animal present when testifying against an accused individual.



Mainstream Media Look at Divorce Pet Custody Disputes

The legislative discussions over considering household animals as a special category whose interests must be considered when courts award dispositions of property in divorce settlements reached mainstream news media in June, with both [The Economist](#) and the [Washington Post](#) writing somewhat humorous articles about this new serious trend.

“Pet custody laws in America are changing,” wrote *The Economist* on June 18, describing the problematic case in Delaware of Tucker the goldendoodle ([See the June 2025 LINK-Letter](#)) whose owners were not married and therefore not covered under the state’s existing law. This created a “bone of contention.”

The article noted that a court weighing what an animal’s best interests are may have to decide “a particularly hairy dispute.” Divorce laws must treat animals as



property, but eight states have already started to “break from the pack” by enacting laws requiring judges to weigh the best interests of animals in divorce disputes.

Two additional states – Massachusetts and Pennsylvania – are still considering similar laws this session, while another bill in Arizona died earlier this legislative session. An Illinois bill awaiting the governor’s signature would extend these provisions covering shared pets to unmarried couples, long-term partners and roommates.

The Economist suggested couples create “pet-nups”, prenuptial-style agreements spelling out who

would get to keep the pet if a relationship ends in order to avoid a future “cat-fight”.

Meanwhile, *Washington Post* opinion writer Kathleen Parker said “Divorce is getting hairier. Just ask the family pet.” She cited the Pennsylvania bill, **HB 97**, which would classify pets as “living beings that are generally regarded as cherished family members.”

“Obviously, dogs and cats can’t choose which parent they prefer, nor would they want to, assuming neither human is abusive,” Parker wrote. “But do we really need courts to settle our personal pet policies? People think nothing of sharing custody of their children. Why not the same for pets?”

While arguing that treating pets like children in custody battles could signal a potentially problematic trend, Parker suggested that pets – like children – could help keep a marriage together. “On the bright side, if you’re our pets, we can’t afford a divorce!”

RedRover Awards \$473,085 in Grants to Help Pets and People

RedRover has announced its latest round of



Safe Housing grants, awarding \$473,085 to domestic violence, homeless and animal shelters so people don’t have to leave their pets behind. The grants support capital construction, veterinary and grooming care, and pet supplies and boarding.

Safe Housing grants of up to \$60,000 are available for domestic violence, homeless, and animal shelters. [Safe Housing grant application deadlines](#) are March 1, June 1, and September 1.

The current grant recipients are:

Domestic Violence Shelters:

Connecticut: Meriden Wallingford Chrysalis (\$53,235)

Georgia: Tri-County Protective Agency, \$60,000

Illinois: Harbor House, Kankakee Co., \$60,000

Kansas: Family Life Center of Butler Co., \$59,850

Texas: The Heights Ellis County Family Resources, \$60,000

Utah: South Valley Sanctuary, \$60,000

Homeless Shelter:

Florida: Waterfront Rescue Mission, \$60,000

Animal Shelter:

Virginia: Lucky Dog Animal Rescue, \$60,000

Study Explores Unique Factors in Rural Animal-Related Coercive Control

While much has been written about The Link between intimate partner violence and animal-directed coercive control, little research has addressed how these may be exacerbated in rural environments. A new Canadian study is reporting that the geographic and social isolation of rural living magnifies conditions of coercive control and restricts women's "space for action," making it more difficult to seek help and safety – especially when companion and farm animals are part of the equation.

Living in a rural area physically limits access to safety: formal supports (such as shelters or health care services) are further away; police response times are longer; and natural supports, such as neighbors, are at a greater distance and therefore less accessible in an emergency. The lack of access **Karen Wood** to communication and transportation, and the importance of animals, further complicate these situations. Economic, educational, and employment opportunities, housing, childcare, and legal services are also less available in rural areas, which may restrict a survivor's ability to plan to leave the relationship. These limitations are exploited by perpetrators.



Finding permanent housing or temporary boarding solutions is challenging for larger animals and herds. Jointly owned animals that are an income source with the perpetrator create another barrier to ending the relationship. Meanwhile, guns are widely present and many rural communities are conservative in nature, promoting men as having a more dominant position.

The study conducted focus groups of women in Saskatchewan who reported that their experiences of IPV and coercive control included: physical abuse; sexual violence and coercion; emotional and verbal abuse; economic abuse and control; and threats to their own safety as well as the safety of their children, livestock, and companion animals.

The authors recommend investing in IPV services and education in rural areas, criminalizing coercive control, assisting survivors who jointly own farms with their partners; and providing housing and safekeeping for rural survivors with animals.



-- Wood, K., Giesbrecht, C.J., Brooks, C., Arisman, K. (2025). "I couldn't leave the farm": Rural women's experiences of intimate partner violence and coercive control. *Violence Against Women*, 31(12-13), 3330-3354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012241279117>



Connecticut Strengthens Cross-Reporting Law

Connecticut, which has had a cross-reporting law since 2011 between the Department of Agriculture's town animal control officers and the state Department of Children and Families, has strengthened this process with the signing into law of **S.B. 155** which now requires DCF to include statistics about animal cruelty reports in its annual reports to the General Assembly.

Gov. Edward Lamont signed the law on May 26, to take effect on July 1. It requires DCF to submit annual reports to legislative committees which include the number of written reports concerning suspected animal harm, neglect or cruelty made by department employees or cross-reported by animal control officers through the Department of Agriculture.



Connecticut Gov. Lamont

Those statistics are among an extensive list of DCF reporting requirements concerning the department's services, facilities, family assessment responses, contracted private providers, foster care services, diversion programs, and Behavioral Health Partnership.

In 2015 Connecticut initiated cross-reporting between the Department of Agriculture, which supervises the hundreds of local animal control officers, and DCF ([See the February 2016 LINK-Letter](#)). Animal control officers report suspected animal cruelty cases to the Commissioner of Agriculture, who in turn files a monthly report with the Commissioner of Children and Families. DCF then reviews those reports, cross-references them against addresses where they have ongoing investigations, and provides that information to caseworkers for inclusion in the department's record on the child.

DCF workers are required to report suspected animal abuse to the Commissioner of Agriculture. The law also provides for DCF and animal control personnel to receive training on recognition and reporting of these forms of abuse. However, these statistics have not been previously submitted to the General Assembly as part of annual reporting processes.

Vermont Expands Law Protecting Children from Animal Sexual Abuse

Vermont has enacted a new law that expands the existing crime of Aggravated Cruelty to Animals to now include any sexual conduct with an animal when such conduct involves a minor.

Gov. Phil Scott signed **H.578** into law on June 8 as **Act No. 118** and it took effect July 1. It includes the following activities in the presence of a minor or in which a minor is a participant:

- engaging in sexual conduct with an animal; possessing, selling or transferring an animal for sexual conduct;
- organizing, aiding and abetting such conduct or causes another individual to do so;
- permitting such conduct on one's property;
- advertising such animals;
- and knowingly possessing, filming or distributing obscene visual images of sexual conduct with an animal, or aiding or abetting anyone who is doing so.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Emilie Krasnow (D—Chittenden) also broadens the conduct that constitutes animal cruelty to now include a broader definition of sexual conduct with an animal. These now include knowingly possessing, filming or distributing obscene visual images of sexual conduct with an animal, or aiding or abetting anyone who is doing so.



Rep. Emilie Krasnow

The law adds other provisions regarding failure to comply with a court order to permit periodic unannounced visits by a humane officer and violating a court order prohibiting working or residing with an animal.

ANIMAL SEXUAL ABUSE... and THE LINK

British Criminal Justice Reform Law Addresses Animal Sexual Abuse

Citing what it called a 14-year-long degradation of community policing, undermining of public trust in the police, and the weakening of law enforcement's powers to combat crimes and antisocial behavior, the UK Government has enacted the [Crime and Policing Act 2026](#) which includes a major change in British law addressing animal sexual abuse. It took effect on June 29.

Among the 257 sections in the new law aimed at criminal justice reform, Section 114 changes sexual offense provisions of "sexual activity with an animal." The revision, championed by the [Naturewatch Foundation](#) and [The Links Group UK](#), shifts the focus away from what had been narrowly defined acts and instead centers on the sexual motivation behind animal abuse, which proponents called a more accurate and meaningful approach.

"This provision makes it an offense for a person to intentionally touch an animal, including knowing or being reckless as to that contact, where the touching is sexual in nature," explained Naturewatch's Mark Randell. "Whether an act is 'sexual' is judged objectively, based on whether a reasonable person would consider it sexual due to its nature and the surrounding circumstances or intent. The offense carries penalties of up to two years' imprisonment on indictment."

The government argued for passage of the massive bill, [claiming](#) it will tackle an epidemic of serious



violence and violence against women and girls "that stains our society", protect children and vulnerable adults, and equip police with additional powers to combat antisocial behavior, crime and terrorism.

Among the new provisions to combat violence against women and girls are: enhanced notification requirements on registered sex offenders; giving stalking victims the right to know the identity of the perpetrators; criminalizing pornography depicting strangulation, suffocation and incest; and depicting non-consensual intimate images online.

The new law protects children and vulnerable adults by: introducing a new duty to report child sexual abuse; creating new offenses of child criminal exploitation and taking intimate images without consent; and making grooming behaviors a statutory aggravating factor.

Section 114 Revisions

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 was amended by replacing "intercourse with an animal" with "sexual activity with an animal":

(1) A person commits an offence if—

(a) the person intentionally touches an animal (whether living or dead),

(b) the person knows that, or is reckless as to whether, that is what is touched, and

(c) the touching is sexual.

(2) For the purposes of this section, touching is sexual if a reasonable person would consider that—

(a) because of its nature it may be sexual, and

(b) because of its circumstances or the purpose of any person in relation to it (or both) it is sexual.

(3) A person who commits an offence under this section is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding the general limit in a magistrates' court or a fine (or both);

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years.



“Le Lien” Coalition Addresses Child and Animal Abuse Links



A symposium by our French counterpart on The Link (“Le Lien”), the Association contre la maltraitance animale et humaine (AMAH), convened 60 veterinarians, pediatricians, social workers, lawyers, animal behaviorists, and educators. The symposium, covered in the magazine *La Dépêche vétérinaire*, emphasized the 2021 law that animal welfare organizations intervening in animal abuse cases must report the presence of minors to child protection authorities so that they may be assessed. Speakers addressed animals in the lives of abused children, children in the lives of abused animals, and multidisciplinary efforts in protecting both children and animals. The Link was perhaps best summarized by Sarah El Haïry, High Commissioner for Childhood, who noted, “domestic violence cannot be compartmentalized.”



-- Gagnon, A.-C. (2026). *Violences domestiques : l'Amah insiste sur le lien entre maltraitements animale et humaine. La Dépêche vétérinaire No. 1800.*

Links Group UK Raises Awareness of Equine Link Concerns



Horses have not received as much Link attention as companion animals, so our British counterparts is taking action! [The Links Group UK](#) is working with the British Horse Society in Great Britain, Ireland and Northern Ireland to focus on The Link as it relates to horses. One result was a day of safeguarding training for equestrian coaches, groups and businesses called “What should a safe yard look like?” Speakers reviewed safeguarding in the equine sector and its relevance to “Protecting Animals, Protecting People”. The workshop concluded that further work needs to be done both within and outside the equine sector to raise awareness, to raise the bar on safeguarding within the industry, and to develop and embed accessible and relevant training across the UK and Ireland. Further events are on The Link Group’s agenda.



Lucy’s Project Introduces Australian Lawyers to The Link

Lucy’s Project in Australia got the attention of attorneys in a webinar and an article in the *Law Society of NSW Journal*. In an interview entitled “Beyond property: domestic violence, animal cruelty, and the law,” chief executive Monique Dam called the organization “a nationally recognized voice at the intersection of domestic and family violence, law reform, animal welfare and victim-survivor safety.”

Board director Rishika Pai pointed to a dynamic that lawyers often see. Perpetrators, she said, “use animals as a tool to control victim-survivors by threatening, harming or killing family animals, which causes emotional distress to the human survivors as well” – a pattern that maps closely onto coercive control.

Dam cited the need to give veterinarians a framework to report suspected animal abuse and the need to collect more data in the Australian context to better understand



Monique Dam, left, & Rishika Pai why survivors avoid seeking crisis support because they will not abandon their animals. “It’s very likely the clients people are working with will have animals as members of their family,” Dam said.



LEGISLATION... and THE LINK

Short-session legislative years move quickly, and most state legislatures have already adjourned or are preparing to do so. As these sessions head into the final stretch, we're still following 213 LINK-related measures — including a lot of successes! Please join us in following their progress and alert us to any additional bills we may have missed!

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

Note: Listing 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. 4166 and S. 2196, the Strengthening Protections for Domestic Violence and Stalking Survivors Act of 2025, would add to U.S. Code Title 18, Section 921(a) a new misdemeanor crime of stalking. This would include a course of harassment, intimidation or surveillance that places a person in reasonable fear of, or harm to, the health and safety of, a pet, service animal, or emotional support animal.

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.

H.R. 7544, the Illegal Alien Animal Abuser Removal Act, would make any illegal alien convicted of animal cruelty or fighting subject to immediate deportation.

H.R. 7567, the Farm, Food and National Security Act of 2026 (the "Farm Bill") would reauthorize Protecting Animals With Shelter funding of \$3,000,000 annually through 2031 to make domestic violence shelters pet-friendly.

H.R. 8480, the Protect Our Pets Act, would increase penalties for the most horrific acts of animal abuse including crushing or sexually exploiting animals.

H.R. 8911 and S. 4562, the Animal Violence Exposes Real Threat of Future Violence Act of 2026 would require the Department of Justice to conduct a study into the Link between cruelty towards animals and cruelty towards humans and report its findings and recommendations to Congress within three years. The bills would earmark \$2 million in funding for mental health service providers, police, and animal welfare organizations to prevent animal cruelty and rehabilitate offenders.

ARIZONA

SUCCESS!! **HB 2995** was signed into law on June 22. It allows courts to include a history of domestic violence coercive control in determining child custody and parenting time. It adds to the definition of coercive control "threatening to kill or injure a household pet." Arizona already includes acts of animal cruelty within its definition of domestic violence.

HB 2997 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have imposed additional penalties for individuals who commit acts of animal abuse or neglect in the presence of a minor.

SB 1587 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have allowed parties to a dissolution of marriage to enter into an enforceable agreement or ask the court to enter an order regarding the possession or care of a companion animal and outline factors the court is to consider. It would have created a rebuttable presumption that service animals should remain with the party for whom they provide a service. "Companion animals" would have been defined as including pets, service animals, and animals acquired for business purposes.

CALIFORNIA

AB 119 would require the Department of Social Services to develop a standardized curriculum for mandated reporters of child abuse, which include animal control officers.

SB 1276 would extend existing provisions prohibiting the production and distribution of online sexual content, including animal sexual abuse, involving a minor to also prohibit the downloading or streaming of that sexual content.

COLORADO

HB 26-1131 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have given courts authority to make determinations for the care and custody of pet animals in proceedings for dissolution of marriage and legal separation, taking into account the health, safety, well-being, comfort, and best interest of the pet. The court's decision would have also included whether either party has committed abuse, cruelty, neglect, or violence toward an animal or human. It would also have permitted a court to award temporary custody and care of a pet animal when issuing an emergency protection order.

CONNECTICUT

H.B. 5264 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have expanded "Desmond's Law's" provisions allowing courts to appoint an advocate in proceedings concerning the welfare or custody of a dog or cat to all defined companion animals. It would also expand 3rd-degree assault to include domestic animals, and establish an animal abuse task force.

H.B. 5438 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have allowed applicants and respondents at hearings to issue protection orders, which can include provisions to safeguard the victim's animals, to present or refute evidence demonstrating a pattern of harassment.

SUCCESS!! S.B. 155 requires the Department of Children and Families to include in annual reports to the General Assembly statistics about the number of reports of animal harm, cruelty or neglect received by its own personnel or cross-reported from the Department of Agriculture's local animal control officers.

SUCCESS!! S.B. 318 requires the Commissioner of Agriculture, in consultation with the Office of Victim Services, to study the impact of the need for placement services for the animals belonging to domestic violence victims.

DELAWARE

House Substitute Bill for HB 415 would require veterinarians to report suspected abuse or neglect of animals to the Office of Animal Welfare or other appropriate authority, with confidentiality assured and with immunity from civil and criminal liability and disciplinary action for reporting in good faith. They would need to complete training on the subject every 6 years in order to retain their licenses. Disciplinary sanctions could be imposed for failures to report.

FLORIDA

SB 468 and HB 921 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have required 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.

SUCCESS!! HB 559 makes it a felony for an adult to commit aggravated animal cruelty, animal fighting, or sexual activities involving animals in the presence of a minor, or causes a minor to commit aggravated animal cruelty, animal fighting, or sexual activity with an animal.

SUCCESS!! HB 1159 replaces the term "child pornography" with "child sexual abuse material". It revises the punishments for sexual activities involving animals to a second-or third-degree felony, and requires offenders to be banned from owning, residing with or working with any animals for five years.

SB 796 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have allowed 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.

SUCCESS!! HB 277 and SB 682 add a respondent's threats to injure or kill a family pet, service animal or emotional support animal to the criteria courts can use when determining whether petitioners seeking an injunctive protection order are in imminent danger of domestic violence.

GEORGIA

HB 1409 passed both houses but was vetoed by the Governor. The bill would have added animal service workers, animal control officers, humane society employees, animal cruelty investigators, and animal shelter personnel to the list of professions mandated to report suspected child abuse to the Division of Family and Children Services.

SB 102 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have extended existing prohibitions against dogfighting to include cockfighting, including: owning, training, transporting, selling, charging admission, permitting a minor to attend, or wagering for the purpose of fighting.

HAWAII

HB 698 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have increased 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."

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 = Interventions

Light Blue = Link & Other Crimes

ILLINOIS

HB 72 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have amended 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 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have created 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 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have required, 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 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have expanded the definition of prohibited dissemination of bestiality and other obscene sexual materials to include computer-generated images.

HB 3367 and HB 4475 died when the General Assembly adjourned. They would have allowed 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.

HB 4540, the "Companion Animal Custody Equity Act," would consider the well-being of a dog or cat during a possession dispute regardless of the marital status of the parties.

SB 1716 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have expanded 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 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have made it a felony to injure or kill a service animal.

SB 2103 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have expanded protections granted to petitioners' pets under Stalking No Contact Orders to also include Harassment No Contact Orders.

INDIANA

SUCCESS!! **HB 1165** increases 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. It also updates its unique "domestic violence animal cruelty" statute to now include abusing, abandoning or neglecting an animal, as well as killing it, as a method of coercive control. It is a Class 6 felony.

IOWA

HF 227 and HF 869 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have granted veterinarians immunity from administrative, criminal or civil liability for making good-faith reports of alleged animal misconduct. Veterinarians who knowingly make false reports would have been subject to disciplinary action and civil liability and guilty of a misdemeanor.

HF 670 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have given juvenile courts jurisdiction in proceedings concerning a child under 17 years of age if the alleged offense were animal torture.

SF 2159 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have included bestiality among prohibited Internet materials considered harmful to minors.

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

KANSAS

HB 2707 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have modified the definition of abuse in the Protection From Abuse Act to include acts or threats relating to pets, and allow courts to include pets in protection orders. Such orders could grant the plaintiff with custody and control of the pets and restrain the defendant from harming or coming into contact with the pets.

KENTUCKY

HB 125 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have created new crimes of possession of a firearm by convicted domestic violence abusers and subjects of domestic violence protection orders.

HB 246 ("Kyan's Law") died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have required animal control officers to receive training on recognizing child abuse, with immunity for acting in good faith. Local government units would have been able to opt out of the training.

SUCCESS!! **HB 418 was attached as an amendment to SB 122 and signed into law.** It requires courts determining child custody to consider whether there are allegations of domestic violence and abuse against either party; it would be a presumption that joint custody and equally shared parenting time would not be in the best interests of the child if one party has committed two or more acts of domestic violence and abuse. Kentucky's definition of domestic violence and abuse in KRS 403.720 includes acts against animals intended as coercion, control, punishment, intimidation, or revenge against a household member.

HB 637 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have required veterinarians to report if an animal for which they have a veterinarian-client-patient relationship has been abused." Existing law only permits veterinarians to file such reports.

LOUISIANA

SUCCESS!! **HB 126** will allow victims of sexual abuse to be accompanied by a facility dog. The dog will need to be obscured from the jury at all times. It becomes effective Aug. 1.

ed to foster care.

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

SUCCESS!! **HB 282** and **SB 182** 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.” However, it is not specified whether threats to, or harm of, a vulnerable adult’s animal could be specifically categorized as psychological harm — as is often the case in domestic violence laws

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

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.

HB 5409 would permit the Crime Victims Compensation Fund to reimburse victims needing immediate relocation up to \$2,500 in expenses for pet boarding or pet-related rental deposit fees.

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 died when the Legislature adjourned.** They would have created 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.

HF 3696 and **SF 3847 died when the Legislature adjourned.** They would have expanded the definition of a “crime of violence” to include conviction for felony animal cruelty.

HF 3946 and **SF 4301 died when the Legislature adjourned.** They would have amended “domestic abuse” to include “manifesting a purpose or intent to injure any pet or companion animal owned, possessed or kept by the family or household member.”

MISSISSIPPI

HB 730 died in committee. It would have removed the phrase “mankind” from the archaic definition of “the detestable and abominable crime against nature committed with mankind or with a beast”.

MISSOURI

HB 1839, HB 2921, and HB 3025 would impose civil penalties on commercial entities that allow minors to harmful sexual material, including bestiality. [

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

HB 3048 and **SB 1497 died when the Legislature adjourned.** They would have allowed courts issuing protection orders, which already allow awarding care and custody of pets, to impose a ban on the respondent from possessing or acquiring firearms.

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NEBRASKA

LB 172 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have expanded the definition of child pornography, which includes exposing children to online acts of bestiality, to include computer- or AI-generated visual imagery.

SUCCESS!! LB 753 allows 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, died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have allowed 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 have required 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 was indefinitely postponed. It would have increased 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.

A 814 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 threats against a person's animals are not specifically included in the 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 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 con-

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trol by an abuser.

NEW MEXICO

SB 80 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have added harm or threatened harm to an animal within the definition of "abuse" under the Family Violence Protection Act, and allow courts to issue protection orders granting one party exclusive or shared possession and control of any animals and prohibiting one party from harming or taking the animals.

NEW YORK

A 599 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have added 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 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have allowed 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," died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have prohibited 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 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have set increased prison terms for acts of animal cruelty when committed in the presence of a child.

A 730 and S 1205 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have increased penalties for animal fighting and aggravated animal cruelty and require defendants convicted of aggravated animal cruelty to undergo a psychiatric evaluation.

A 740 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have allowed 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 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have created 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 have been enhanced if the act occurred in the presence of a child.

A 897 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have criminalized knowingly causing a minor to attend an animal fight.

A 1391 and S 5544 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have required persons charged with enforcing anti-cruelty laws to file a report when they have reasonable cause to believe that abuse or maltreatment of a child has also occurred. The bill would further have provided 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 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have relocated 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 cited 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 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have established “care and treatment of service animals, therapy dogs and companion animals in residential programs for victims of domestic violence.” These would have included allowing residents’ service animals and therapy dogs full access to the shelters as long as they did not create an undue burden.

A 1630 died in committee when the Legislature adjourned. It would have amended 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 have been 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 died when the Legislature adjourned. It had cited the prosecution of animal cruelty as a way to protect public safety in requiring all 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 died in committee when the Legislature adjourned. They would have established 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 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have included animal fighting as a criminal act within the category of enterprise corruption crimes.

A 1945 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have enabled veterinarians to earn continuing education credits for providing free veterinary care for individuals residing in domestic violence shelters.

A 2387 and S 6812 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have established a 24-hour toll-free animal abuse reporting hotline.

A 3158 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have required courts to require a mental health evaluation for offenders convicted of aggravated animal cruelty or animal fighting.

A 3206 and S 1159 died in committee when the Legislature adjourned. They would have created a new category of “domestic violence crimes” to include interfering, harassing, intimidating, or harming a family or household member’s service animal.

A 3528 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have made 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,” died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have required an investigation into possible domestic violence or abuse for persons who have been accused of animal abuse.

A 4899 and S 2280 went through several iterations but died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have required 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 have been “Did they ever threaten to kill you, your children, or your pets?”

A 5815 and S 4613 died in committee when the Legislature adjourned. They would have expended 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,” went through several iterations but died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have required 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 died in committee. They would have expanded 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 died in committees when the Legislature adjourned. They would have made 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.

A 8375 and S 7612 passed both the Assembly and the Senate. They 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.

A 10826 and S 8030 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have required 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.

A 10857 and S 8035 died in committees. They would have expanded protection orders which allow courts to enjoin an individual from harming an animal to also grant the petitioner exclusive care, custody or control of the animal.

A 11182 and S 9427 died when the Legislature adjourned. They would have defined threats or harm to animals as coercive control.

S 470, “Kirby and Quigley’s Law,” died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have expanded aggravated animal cruelty to include harm to a companion animal during the commission of a felony.

S 1411 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have required animal cruelty offenders to undergo a psychiatric analysis and evaluation.

S 6880 died in committee when the Legislature adjourned. It would have authorized a lengthier prison sentence for committing aggravated animal cruelty during an incident of domestic violence.

S 8927 passed the Senate but died in the Assembly. It would have directed 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.

S 10308 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have required anyone with a farm operation that houses horses or cows to complete an animal cruelty prevention workshop that would include laws regarding cross-reporting of animal abuse to proper authorities.

NORTH CAROLINA

SB 274 would replace the “crime against nature” with the term “bestiality”.

SB 573 would define standards for adequate space and shelter for animals and define “companion animal hoarders” as those having 10 or more animals, fails to abide by the standards, and has an inability to recognize or has a reckless disregard for the deleterious conditions in which the animals are living, It would require individuals convicted of companion animal hoarding to undergo psychological evaluation and treatment.

SB 591 would make cockfighting and animal-fighting paraphernalia illegal and prohibit allowing minors under age 18 from attending a cockfight or dogfight.

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.

SB 265 would add a history of conviction for animal cruelty offenses to the other violations that would disqualify individuals from being allowed to foster or adopt a child.

SB 393 would make it illegal to create, record, photograph, film, develop, reproduce, or publish any obscene material that depicts another person engaging in sexual conduct with an animal. Bona fide uses would be exempted. It also raises the crime of bestiality from a misdemeanor to a felony.

OKLAHOMA

HB 2058 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have expanded existing provisions to include pets in domestic violence protection orders to also include any adult victim of a crime with a need to prevent further victimization.

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SB 1728 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have added a new category of “coercive control”, which would have included committing or threatening to commit cruelty to an animal that intimidates a household member, to the Protection From Domestic Abuse Act.

SB 1982 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have added a new crime of “unlawful pornography” which would have included images of sexual activity with an animal.

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.

HB 2476, the Protecting Pets in Domestic Violence Situations Act, would allow out-of-pocket expenses related to domestic violence survivors' having to relocate or temporarily board their household pets to be compensable under the state's Crime Victim Compensation Program.

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.

RHODE ISLAND

H 7133-A and S 3217 died when the General Assembly adjourned. They would have extended 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.

H 7194 and S 2723 died when the General Assembly adjourned. They would have added crimes against companion animals to the definition of domestic violence under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act.

S 2489 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have included "coercive control," including committing or threatening to commit cruelty to animals that intimidates another, within the definition of "domestic abuse".

SOUTH CAROLINA

H4123 and S 919, the Protection of Minors from Pornography and Obscenities Act, died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have closed a loophole and made 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.

H 5505 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have created a new crime of "sexual abuse of an animal". South Carolina already has an archaic statute criminalizing "buggery with mankind or with beast".

SOUTH DAKOTA

SUCCESS!! **SB 81** clarifies 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. It was signed into law on March 9.

TENNESSEE

HB 1444 and SB 1475 died when the General Assembly adjourned. They would have added aggravated animal cruelty to animals as an offense for which a juvenile may be classified as a serious youthful offender.

UTAH

HB 23 would have increased the penalty for injuring, harassing or endangering a service animal from a misdemeanor to a felony, but that provision was deleted in an amended version that was signed into law.

HB 341 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have made it a Class B misdemeanor to cause or allow a minor to attend a dogfight or a cock fight.

SUCCESS!! **SB 72** creates a new definition and standalone criminal offense of "obscene animal abuse material"; separates animal sexual abuse from the current definition of pornography; adds animal crushing to the offense of distributing obscene animal abuse material; and ensures that obscene animal abuse material is treated throughout the code as pornographic materials.

SB 102 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have added animal control officers to the list of professionals designated as first responders.

SB 115 died in committee. It would have required 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 have been 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 have been protected from an employer's prohibiting such reports or penalizing the veterinarian making the report.

VERMONT

H.492 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have introduced "coercive control" into the animal cruelty context. Individuals who commit or threaten animal cruelty in order to influence a victim of domestic abuse would have faced additional penalties.

SUCCESS!! **H.578 was signed into law on June 8.** Engaging in sexual conduct with an animal in the presence of a minor or in which a minor is a participant is now a crime of aggravated animal cruelty.

H.875 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have expanded the prohibition against promoting and possessing sexual content involving children, including bestiality, to include computer-generated images.

VIRGINIA

HB 208 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have added 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 have protected the petitioner, family and household members and include granting the petitioner possession of any companion animal.

HB 266 died when the General Assembly adjourned. It would have created 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.

SUCCESS!! HB 901 was signed into law on April 13. It will 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 could 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.” It became effective July 1.

SUCCESS!! SB 495 was signed into law on April 13. It allows courts to include recent acts of violence, force or threat toward an animal as cause for issuing an Emergency Substantial Risk order prohibiting a respondent under a protective order from possessing firearms for the duration of the order. It took effect July 1.

WASHINGTON

SB 6306, “providing equal protections for children and pets”, died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have required animal control officers to notify law enforcement when they have probable cause to believe that circumstances affecting the animal may also affect the child. Children taken into custody as a result of these reports could not be returned home until a court had determined that the home is safe

for both the child and the animal and a joint safety plan for both had been developed.

WEST VIRGINIA

HB 4130 and HB 5207 died when the Legislature adjourned. The bills would have established a new crime of hoarding of animals. Offenders would have faced misdemeanor fines of up to \$500 and risk having their animals turned over to an animal shelter for care and relocation.

SUCCESS!! HB 4412 was signed into law on April 1. It establishes liability for publishers and distributors of sexual material harmful to minors, including “patently and sexually offensive” materials including bestiality.

HB 4725 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have added a new section to West Virginia Code 61-9-19 (Crimes Against Chastity, Morality and Decency) to make the commission of a sexual act with an animal a felony, punishable by a fine of \$1,000 to \$5,000.

HB 5322 and HB 5335 died when the Legislature adjourned. The bills would have made sexual abuse of an animal and related activities a misdemeanor; offenders with prior sexual abuse convictions, or who cause serious bodily injury or death to the animal, or who engage a minor would have been guilty of a felony.

HB 5419 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have defined working law enforcement and Search & Rescue K-9s as law enforcement officers; assault or battery of an on-duty animal would be treated similar to a crime against a human law enforcement officer.

SB 192 and SB 688 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have created a new misdemeanor crime of Assault Upon a Service Animal and subject the offender to making financial restitution for costs.

SB 714 died when the Legislature adjourned. It would have allowed 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.

WYOMING

HB 72 died in committee. It would have created a new crime of promoting obscenity to a minor that would have included depictions of sex between a human and an animal.

CANADA

SUCCESS!! Bill C-16, the Protecting Victims Act, was given Royal Assent on June 18. The new law amends the Criminal Code to create a new offence that prohibits engaging in a pattern of coercive or controlling conduct toward animals known to an intimate partner, and also criminalize the distribution of visual representations of bestiality.

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.

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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

July 21 — Nashville, Tenn.: Phil Arkow will present "Protecting Woman's Best Friend: Assessing the Impact of 'Pet Protection Orders'" at the National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges' [89th Annual Conference](#).

July 21 — 23 — Las Vegas, Nev.: The National Organization for Victim Advocacy's [52nd Annual Training Event](#) will include: Julie Bereckis of HOPE Animal Assisted Crisis Response (AACR) presenting "How to use specially trained canines to assist your victims and you in a crisis and through trauma!"; Katie Campbell of RedRover presenting "Removing a barrier to safety: Creating pet housing programs that support both ends of the leash!"; and Valerie Pena of the Animal Welfare Institute presenting "Safe Havens for Pets: Locating Sheltering Resources for Individuals with Pets".

July 28 — Colorado Springs, Colo. (online): Danielle Works from RedRover will present "Integrating Pets into Survivor-Centered Care" in a [webinar](#) for the Justice Clearinghouse.

July 29 — (online): Don't Forget the Pets will hold a [webinar](#), "Pet Behavior 201: Setting Pets Up for Success," to help families experiencing domestic violence learn strategies to manage pets' behavior.

Aug. 3-6 — Oxford, U.K.: Presentations at the 11th Annual [Oxford Animal Ethics Summer School](#) will include: James Erselius of the Animal Legal Defense Fund on "Animal Harm as Public Injury"; Christina Warner on "Ruby's Law: Advancing Ethical Strategies for Animal Protection in Domestic Abuse Cases"; Emily B. Knickerbocker on "Safe Haven for All: A Policy Proposal for Pet-Inclusive Domestic Violence Shelters in New York City"; and Julia Dyrdycka-Borowa on "Redefining Violence as a Strategy for Animal Protection".

Aug. 4 (online): Virginia veterinary diagnostician Jaime Weisman will present "Working with your Pathologist: Maximizing Necropsy Evidence in Animal Cruelty Cases" in a [webinar](#) for the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys.

Aug. 5 — Tulsa, Okla.: Don't Forget the Pets will hold a free [training workshop](#) on how to create and sustain pet housing programs for survivors of domestic violence and people experiencing homelessness.

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.

Aug. 19 — Canberra, Australia: Lucy's Project will [launch](#) the National Roadmap for Change to Prevent and End Family Violence Against People and Animals with panels of Link advocates and legislators.

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](#).

Sept. 6 — Tokyo, Japan (online): Keiko Yamazaki of the Animal Literacy Research Institute will conduct a [webinar](#) on "The Association Between Animal Abuse and Interpersonal Violence: Knowing the Negative Connections Between Human and Animal Welfare."

Sept. 17 — Canton, Ga.: Dan Ettinger will present "Foundations of Animal Hoarding, Cruelty, and Neglect" at the Southeastern Animal Control Association [Conference](#).

Sept. 24 — United Kingdom (online): The Links Group UK will conduct a [webinar](#) on "The Use and Abuse of Animals by Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse".

LINK TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES



Sept. 24 -- Sydney, Australia: Lucy's Project will [launch](#) the National Road map for Change to Prevent and End Family Violence Against People and Animals with panels of Link advocates and legislators.

Sept. 30 — Louisville, Ky.: Phil Arkow will present "Learn What the Monster Likes – and Feed It! Bridging the Animal Control/Rights/Welfare Gap by Focusing on The Link between Animal Cruelty and Human Violence" at the Kentucky Animal Care & Control Association [Annual Training Conference](#).

Oct. 1 — Allegan, Mich.: [Allie Phillips](#) will present on "'When Animal Abuse Links to Family Violence: Strategies for Safety'" for the Allegan County Coordinating Council on Domestic Violence.

Oct. 4 — Asheville, N.C.: Phil Arkow will present "Another One Health Role for Veterinarians: Response to Animal Cruelty and Other Family Violence" at the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Association's [Compassionate Care Symposium](#).

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's [9th Summit](#) will feature: Phil Arkow presenting "Protecting 'Woman's Best Friend': Assessing the Impact of Animal-Inclusive Protection Orders"; Shoshana Mostoller and Erin Doyle presenting "Keeping Families Together: Advancing Pet-Inclusive Shelter Policy in New England"; Kristina Hill presenting "Preventing Animal Hoarding through Cross-Sector, Less Punitive Systems: A One Health Approach"; and Aviva Vincent presenting "Whole Families, While Lives: Integrating Veterinary Social Work into Child Welfare Practice."

Oct. 16-18 — Washington, D.C.: Randy Lockwood will be among the many speakers at the [Animal Law Conference](#), sponsored by the Animal Legal Defense Fund and the Lewis & Clark Law School.

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

Oct. 21-23 — Richmond, B.C., Canada: Courtney Dowdall will present the results of a pilot study on using canine behavioral consultants to help domestic violence survivors' traumatized dogs settle into transitional housing at the British Columbia Society of Transition Houses' [Annual Training Forum](#).

Oct. 22 — Colorado Springs, Colo. (online): Michelle Welch will present "The Investigation and Prosecution of Hoarding Cases" in a [webinar](#) for the Justice Clearinghouse.

Nov. 3 — Colorado Springs, Colo. (online): Danielle Works of RedRover will present "Safety Planning with Pets" in a [webinar](#) for the Justice Clearinghouse.

Nov. 4-6 — Vancouver, Wash.: The Association of Prosecuting Attorneys will hold its 15th National [Animal Cruelty Prosecution Conference](#).

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 [25th Anniversary celebration](#) inaugurating 16 Days of Activism 2026.

Dec. 2 — United Kingdom (online): The Links Group UK will conduct a [webinar](#) on "The Use and Abuse of Animals by Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse".

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

March 14, 2027 — Portland, Ore.: Phil Arkow will present "Protecting Woman's Best Friend: Assessing the Impact of 'Animal-Inclusive Protection Orders'" at the Animal Legal Defense Fund's 35th Annual [Animal Law Conference](#).

THE LINK... in the NEWS

Dog Trainer Gets 15-19 Years for Cruelty, Theft and Tax Evasion

An Ohio dog trainer who repeatedly broke plea-bargained probation after being indicted on more than 200 charges of animal cruelty and other crimes was handed a record prison sentence of 15-to-19 years in prison. The Dayton [Daily News](#) reported that Jason Thomas Jones, 47, of Huber Heights had been indicted in 2024 on 181 counts involving 133 pet owners who lost money when they put their trust in a dog trainer who they say returned their pets untrained, covered in feces, underweight with rashes, missing fur and, in at least one case, with filed teeth.



Mat Heck, Jr.

He pled guilty in January 2025 to 181 charges of animal cruelty, theft, failure to file state income taxes, and engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity. On March 14 he was sentenced to five years of probation and community service and to make \$341,000 in restitution to former clients. After failing to make minimum monthly restitution payments and testing positive for a controlled substance, Montgomery County Common Pleas Judge Kimberly Melnick sentenced Jones to prison. Two co-defendants – a current girlfriend and an alleged ex-girlfriend – pled no-contest to theft charges and received short probationary sentences.

Louisiana Man Charged with 3 Counts of Animal Sex Abuse and 74 Counts of Child Pornography

Christopher Campbell, 21, of Lafayette, La., was charged with 74 counts of possession of child sexual abuse material and three counts of sexual abuse of an animal after a tip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children triggered an investigation.

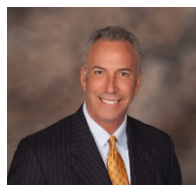
[KLFY-TV](#) reported that Campbell was arrested on May 28 and booked into the Lafayette Parish jail on a \$105,000 bond, following the investigation by the Louisiana Parish Sheriffs Office, Louisiana Bureau of Investigation, and the Department of Homeland security.



"This defendant ran his so-called business in a way that suggested he believed he could escape the consequences of taking people's money, torturing their dogs and providing little to no actual dog training," Montgomery County Prosecutor Mat Heck Jr. said following his original sentencing hearing. "The number of victims is staggering. As a dog owner, I am relieved that his criminal activities have been stopped."

Woman's Racing Horses Stabbed by Alleged "Crazy, Obsessed Stalker"

Police in Las Vegas, Nev. arrested a teenage girl who was accused of being a "crazy, obsessed stalker" who followed a woman to the National Barrel Horse Association's supershow and allegedly



Steven Wolfson

stabbed three of her horses with a knife. Clark County District Attorney Steven Wolfson said the girl, who was not named because she is a minor, was nevertheless being charged as an adult on four counts of malicious killing and maiming an animal and destruction of private property.

The horses' owner, Arielle Phillips, said the girl had been following her on social media for a long time and saw the show as a chance to finally meet her and her mare. [News media](#) reported that the teenager confronted Phillips twice before the attacks and was asking "weird questions." The injuries to the horses, "Detail," "Rocket" and "Sully" were believed to be non-life-threatening but prevented them from competing.

"These allegations involve deliberate acts of extreme cruelty against defenseless animals and have had a significant impact on the victims, the owners, and the broader equestrian community," [Wolfson wrote](#).

"Detail would walk away from a fresh pile of hay just to come greet me and love on me. She now does not let me even put my hands near her. She is traumatized," said Phillips. "Every time she runs away from the approach of my hand, I burst into tears. This is my best friend. An innocent sweet horse, who only knows how to give me her ALL was brutally tortured for no reason."

THE LINK... in the NEWS

Parents — Including Father with Animal Cruelty History — Charged in Death of Newborn Baby

The parents of a one-day-old newborn infant who died of what forensic examiners called multiple internal injuries have been charged with homicide, aggravated assault, and endangering the welfare of children. The [Berks County, Pa. District Attorney's Office](#) reported that Kevin Canaan, 28, of Reading, Pa. — who had been charged in 2022 with animal cruelty and theft — and Yeniffer Tavarez-Cepeda, 25, of New York, were charged in the death of the unnamed baby boy. Authorities allege that the traumatic injuries occurred while the infant was under the parents' supervision in a private room in a hospital maternity ward, that the injuries were not consistent with the birthing process, and that the parents failed to notify medical personnel of the infant's distress.



Atlanta Convicted Felon Charged with Bestiality

An Atlanta, Ga. man with a 30-year criminal history including 12 prior bookings and nine years in state prison was charged with felony counts for the sexual assault and strangulation of two dogs at a shopping center parking deck. Dorie Trimez Wilson, 48, was charged with two counts of bestiality, two counts of aggravated cruelty to animals, and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. [Fox5 Atlanta](#) reported that Wilson's extensive history with the justice system includes at least 12 recorded bookings in Fulton County dating back to 1998, with charges ranging from stalking and terroristic threats to burglary and aggravated assault. His most recent incarceration followed a 10-year sentence which concluded with his release in May 2017. At the time of his arrest, Wilson was out on bond for 2025 drug distribution charges.



Cat Rescuer Charged with Elder Abuse and Animal Neglect

Central Point, Ore. police responding to a report of elder abuse and animal neglect reportedly found a 65-year-old malnourished woman with the mental capacity of a 3-year-old and sores and "suspicious" injuries, on the ground in a bedroom covered in human and cat feces, and 80 cats that were rescued by the Oregon Humane Society. [KOIN-TV](#) reported that the suspect, Jennifer Lynn Griswold, 43, is facing charges including criminal mistreatment, animal abuse and animal neglect. Police said Griswold claimed to be the president of Saving Hearts Animal Rescue. Officers responding to the scene said the home was filled with hoarded belongings, and reeked of strong cat urine and the smell of decaying bodies. Court documents said a majority of the cats were in multiple inches of feces and appeared malnourished.



Floridian Accused of Beating Two Dogs and Assaulting Girlfriend

After two months of allegedly abusing his girlfriend and her dogs, Browen Sweet of Lehigh Acres, Fla. was arrested by Lee County Sheriff's deputies on charges of animal cruelty and battery. [Gulf Coast News](#) reported that Sweet's girlfriend reported that he had assaulted her and tried to drown one of her two shar-peis and struck the other multiple times with a broom. Both dogs were expected to recover. "Anyone who can repeatedly beat defenseless animals and terrorize a victim inside their own home is dangerous, violent and cowardly," said Sheriff Carmine Marceno, who has long been known for taking aggressive steps against abusers of animals and people. "In Lee County, we will aggressively pursue criminals who abuse the innocent."



Sheriff Marceno

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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