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



Leading articles in this issue:



Veterinarians are "key stakeholders" in animal cruelty cases *(Page 11)*



Veterinary Social Workers can address "the other end of the leash" *(Page 10)*



Care becomes compromised in animal hoarding cases *(Page 13)*

A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO DOUBLE YOUR GIFT TO THE NATIONAL LINK COALITION

An anonymous donor has given us a unique challenge. They will grant $25,000 to support *The LINK-Letter* – but only if we can match it with another $25,000 in gifts. We need your help – and your tax-deductible donation will be doubled!

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Inside this issue

Groundbreaking study:
Wildlife and The LINK 2
Domestic Violence & The LINK 4
Veterinary Medicine & The LINK 10
Animal Sexual Abuse & The LINK 11
Animal Hoarding & The LINK 13
The Courts & The LINK 16
News from LINK Coalitions 17
The LINK in the Literature 18
Raising Global LINK Awareness 21
Legislation & The LINK 22
LINK Training Calendar 31
The LINK in the News 33

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Cruelty to Wildlife Linked to Child Abuse and Domestic Violence

While extensive previous research has identified significant relationships between companion animal abuse and child abuse, and animal abuse and intimate partner violence, few if any studies have explored these Links in the context of intentional aggression towards wildlife outside of lawful hunting practices or agricultural contexts. Two new exploratory studies have identified dramatic increases in the killing of wildlife Linked with child abuse and IPV.

In the first study, the researchers, based at Kansas State University and the Animal Welfare Institute, surveyed 622 individuals who reported on their current or most recent partner's child abuse perpetration and wildlife aggression. Killing wildlife was associated with a 712% increase in any form of child abuse perpetration and intentionally harming wildlife was associated with a 1548% increase in child abuse perpetration. Cruelty-motivated harm to wildlife was associated with a 2445% increase in very severe physical child abuse perpetration.

The most frequently harmed or killed animals were squirrels, birds, stray cats, and raccoons. "These findings are notable, as birds and squirrels, which were the most frequently harmed or killed wildlife, are typically non-threatening animals, which suggests intentional, non-defensive harm toward vulnerable targets. The aggression against raccoons may reflect aggressive or retaliatory responses to perceived nuisance behavior, particularly when non-violent management strategies are available.

"Aggression toward stray cats is particularly concerning," they continued, "as previous research has tied cruelty toward cats with severe IPV perpetration, child abuse, and general aggression."

They also reported that harming or killing wildlife "for entertainment" or "for no reason" was associated with a 2853% increase in the likelihood of physical child abuse and a 2445% increase in very severe physical child abuse. The researchers speculated that childhood cruelty to companion animals may be more due, in part, to the proximity of household pets, and the increased likelihood that pet abuse is witnessed by family members, or even used as a tool to manipulate and control them. Wildlife harm may also be taken less seriously due to lesser legal protections and the notion that certain acts of aggression toward wildlife may be viewed as more socially acceptable.



Clockwise, from top left: Chelsea Spencer, Noah Renken, Mariah Moore, and Claire Coughlin

They added that cruelty to wildlife may not be cross-reported in those states in which child protection and animal control officers are mandated reporters of suspected child or animal abuse.

"Future research should examine whether wildlife aggression may provide useful contextual information for animal control, law enforcement, and other professionals investigating animal cruelty, as well as whether existing cross-training initiatives could benefit from considering forms of animal aggression beyond companion animal abuse," they concluded.

(Continued on Page 3)

For Additional Information

Just click on the blue underlined hyperlinks in these articles to take you to other websites with additional information about that topic.

Cruelty to Wildlife Linked to Child Abuse and Domestic Violence

(Continued from Page 2)

WILDLIFE AGGRESSION AND IPV PERPETRATION

In the second, related study that surveyed 1,485 participants, the researchers found that those who intentionally harmed or killed wildlife had higher prevalence of all types of IPV perpetration compared with those who did not harm wildlife.

Specifically, harming wildlife was associated with a 1248% increase in any type of IPV perpetration, while killing wildlife was associated with a 1021% increase. Similar to the child abuse study, the most frequently harmed animals were squirrels, birds and stray cats.

As with the child abuse study, the IPV survey noted that research on harmful interactions with wildlife is more limited than with companion animals, given that wild animals are generally not found in an abuser's home and a lack of empathy may contribute to wildlife aggression. They note, however, that some serial killers have historically harmed wild animals in their childhood.

Among those who had intentionally killed wildlife, 95.5% perpetrated psychological IPV, 88.3% perpetrated physical IPV, 82% perpetrated sexual IPV, and 76% perpetrated severe IPV. Similar findings were reported for individuals who intentionally hurt or harmed wildlife.

"Wildlife aggression may represent an overlooked indicator of interpersonal violence perpetration."

Having intentionally killed or harmed wildlife was associated with an 843% and 1290% increase, respectively, on the likelihood of also perpetrating physical IPV. Those whose wildlife aggression was specifically motivated by a desire to be cruel were found to have significant increases in the likelihood of perpatrating physical, psychological, sexual, and severe IPV. Overall, rates of intentional wildlife aggression were higher than expected.

That abusers specifically sought out non-threatening species such as birds and squirrels "suggests that individuals are likely seeking out to harm these animals for opportunistic or thrill-seeking reasons, and not out of protection or necessity. Harming stray cats underscores the long history of cruelty toward cats and may be related to a prejudice against a certain species," they added.

Killing wildlife may be more socially sanctioned or acceptable than harming companion animals. Meanwhile, the gender dynamics of hunting suggest that these environments may reinforce norms related to dominance and hierarchical power, they added.

These patterns are "consistent with theoretical perspectives emphasizing the role of underlying beliefs and dominance-oriented value systems in shaping aggressive behavior across contexts," they wrote. The study results extend the literature on the companion animal/IPV Link by demonstrating that aggression toward wildlife is similarly associated with elevated rates of IPV perpetration.

The authors concluded that wildlife aggression may represent an overlooked risk marker for perpetrating intimate partner violence. They also recommended that animal control officers -- whose work is generally restricted to companion animals -- as well as state game and wildlife officials should be educated to focus more broadly on The Link between IPV and violence against multiple species.

-- Spencer, C.M., Renken, N.D., Moore, M., & Coughlin, C. (2026). Associations between intentional wildlife aggression and child abuse perpetration. *Child Abuse & Neglect.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2026.108347

-- Spencer, C.M., Moore, M.M., Renken, N.D., & Coughlin, C. (2026). The relationshiop between wildlife aggression and intimate partner violence perpetration. *Anthrozoos, 39*(5), 931-945. https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2026.2717011



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE... and THE LINK

Four exciting new training materials have come to our attention this month that are informing veterinarians, attorneys, and animal care and control personnel about recognizing signs that should raise concerns about a domestic violence survivor's well-being. We're pleased to showcase these materials:

"DV... and the DVM"

Animal Welfare Institute Guidelines for Veterinary and Animal Care & Control Professionals

The Animal Welfare Institute has just published two handy guidelines to help veterinary and animal care and control professionals recognize and respond to suspected victims of domestic violence they may encounter in their clinics, shelters and field calls.



Domestic Violence: Tips for Veterinary Offices alerts veterinarians that animal abuse and domestic violence often occur in the same homes. "Veterinary professionals are often the first to recognize signs of abuse, both in animals and their owners," it notes. "Abused individuals, in fact, may seek help for their pets before seeking help for themselves."

The brochure offers offers tips on recognizing injuries and behavioral signs in patients and clients that might suggest domestic violence. It lists privacy and documentation protocols and three questions that should be asked as part of standard practice, and ideas for making the clinic a safe space for survivors. A QR code offers resources from the National Domestic Violence Hotline.



Signs of Domestic Violence: Guidelines for Animal Welfare Professionals advises field and shelter personnel that "whether you are conducting a home visit, responding to an animal control report, or treating an animal in your clinic, be aware that you may encounter pet owners whose own well-being is at risk. While your professional focus is on the animals, you may also be uniquely positioned to notice warning signs of domestic violence."

The flyer offers 19 telltale signs in the family's dynamics and behaviors, physical signs of abuse, and the living environment that raise concerns about an individual's well-being. It also offers a link to the National DV Hotline for resources and reporting these concerns.

The materials are currently available in English with plans to have them translated into Spanish.

Victim2Verdict Encourages Veterinarians to Recognize Potential Domestic Violence

In October, Victim 2 Verdict reminded veterinarians that because they occupy a unique position at the intersection of animal welfare and human health and safety, they may encounter warning signs of domestic violence during examinations and conversations with clients.

"Recognizing and responding to domestic violence is not about asking or expecting veterinarians to become investigators or counselors," the group emphasized. "It is about understanding that animal welfare and human safety are interconnected, recognizing potential indicators of abuse, and knowing how to respond compassionately and responsibly."

Victim 2 Verdfict offered a checklist of important steps veterinarians can take:

Recognize warning signs.	Note unexplained injuries, fearful behavior, controlling partner dynamics, threats involving pets or other concerning patterns.
Assess immediate safety.	Consider whether the client and/or animal may be in immediate danger.
Speak privately when safe.	Use calm, nonjudgmental language. Avoid questioning the client in front of a potentially abusive partner.
Document objectively.	Record observations and statements in the client's own words. Note findings in the medical record.
Avoid confrontation.	Do not make accusations or take actions that could escalate risk.
Understand legal obligations.	Review applicable reporting laws and clinic protocols; know where to file reports.
Follow up safely.	Ask the client how, or whether, it is safe to contact them again.

"DV... and Attorneys"

ABA Offers Guidance to Help Attorneys Help DV Clients with Pets

How can attorneys best support their domestic violence clients who have pets?

That's a question that the American Bar Association's Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence addressed shortly before the ABA adopted its historic Resolution No. 504 last year *(See the February 2025 LINK-Letter)* that supported making provisions for the safety of pets in court proceedings, civil protection orders and housing options for victims.

In a "Five for Five" article, the CDSV team emphasized how pets can serve as consistent sources of companionship and protection during the isolation often caused by domestic violence and a means by which abusers can instill "psychological terror".

"It is important that attorneys who work with domestic violence survivors not only recognize the important place pets may occupy in the lives of their clients but also be prepared to address pet-related issues that appear in their cases," the Commission wrote, in listing five specific actions that attorneys can take for domestic violence clients for whom pets are a priority:

1. Ask About Pets When Discussions Client Goals and Safety Planning

"Asking about pets can also signal to your client that you acknowledge pets as a valid priority and are willing to help with pet-related concerns," they wrote, adding that if the attorney doesn't bring up the question the client may not think to mention it.

Attorneys can advise clients about:

- Gathering the pet's veterinary documents;
- Updating and protecting microchip information;
- Switching veterinarians;
- Discussing privacy concerns with the client's veterinarian;
- Arranging for the pet to stay with a trusted person;
- Reducing the pet's visibility to the abuser.

2. Know Your State's Civil Protection Order Provisions Regarding Pets

This includes not only knowing whether the client resides in one of the 42 states where animals can be included in protection orders, but also whether state law allows a history of abuse of a victim's pet as a basis for issuing an order. It is also important to know which types of animals may be included.

3. Research Pet-Friendly Domestic Violence Shelters and Other Sheltering Options in Your Area

Clients may not be aware of what sheltering and transitional housing options in their area allow pets to be included in the safety plan. If no such facilities are available, attorneys can contact veterinarians and boarding kennels to see what kind of arrangements might be made; these facilities may be more willing to listen to an attorney than a client in crisis, and it helps alleviate the burden of a client dealing with multiple stressors.

4. Learn About Free or Low-Cost Veterinary Care in Your Area

The animal may be in urgent need of veterinary care, or preventive vaccines to be able to be admitted to a domestic violence shelter.

5. Know Your State's Veterinary Reporting Laws

State laws mandating or permitting veterinary reporting of suspected animal abuse vary considerably, and attorneys can help clients – who may be fearful of reporting the abuse themselves – to navigate their state's systems.

Pet Abuse Also a Risk Factor for Victims' Mental Health

While extensive research documents how the "weaponization" of pets is a significant barrier to domestic violence victims being able to escape, what is believed to be the first study of its kind is reporting that the perpetration of coercive-control pet abuse is also a significant risk marker for victims' adverse mental health and psychological distress.

The researchers, based at Kansas State University, surveyed 1,173 participants to examine the relationship between a partner's pet abuse perpetration and depression, anxiety, and PTSD and how pet abuse might mediate the relationship between intimate partner violence (IPV) victimization and mental health outcomes. They concluded that "pet abuse is a significant risk marker for IPV and psychological distress. Pet abuse warrants both legal recognition as a form of domestic violence and clinical recognition as a distinct source of trauma."

Over half of the sample had experienced psychological or physical IPV victimization. Among those whose partner had interacted with a pet, 37.5% and 41% reported their partner had abused a cat or dog, respectively. The abuse of a cat or a dog was significantly associated with victim depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms.

> ***"Pet abuse warrants both legal recognition as a form of domestic violence and clinical recognition as a distinct source of trauma."***
> ***-- Renken, Spencer & Moore***

"Both cat and dog abuse perpetration emerged as stronger predictors of mental health symptomology than physical and sexual IPV across all models, suggesting pet abuse may have a greater impact on victims' mental health than previously recognized," they reported. "Further, that psychological IPV and pet abuse consistently emerged as some of the strongest predictors may reflect their shared nature as mechanisms for coercive control."

They also found that cat and dog abuse significantly mediated the relationships between physical and sexual IPV and depression, anxiety, and PTSD, but not the relationship between psychological IPV and these outcomes. "Taken together, our results highlight pet abuse as a serious risk marker for mental health symptomology among victims. Additionally, pet abuse may serve as a unique mechanism for psychological harm in contexts where victims experience overt, physical abuse (i.e., physical and sexual IPV).

"Our research yields important clinical and policy implications, including the recognition of pet abuse as a distinct form of trauma within coercive relationships," they added.

They also found that younger age was associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms, consistent with previous research demonstrating that these symptoms are more common among younger adults. Younger age was also associated with higher levels of partner perpetrated pet abuse, which aligns with previous research indicating that younger individuals are more likely to engage in animal abuse.

"Given that pet abuse itself has been recognized as a distinct coercive control tactic for victims of physical and sexual IPV, witnessing pet abuse may add a distinct layer of harm that exacerbates their psychological suffering," they noted.

> ***"Witnessing pet abuse may add a distinct layer of harm that exacerbates their psychological suffering."***
> ***-- Renken, Spencer & Moore***

They also addressed how pets may be buffers or consoling agents for domestic violence victims. "IPV victimization is associated with various adverse outcomes, including increased anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidality. Given this, it follows that victims commonly turn to household pets as a source of emotional support and safety," they said.

"Unfortunately, this bond can be weaponized by perpetrators as a way to further control their partners, as evidenced by findings that victims commonly delay leaving abusive relationships due to concerns regarding pet safety. It is unsurprising that pet abuse contributes to the psychological suffering of IPV victims."

-- Renken, N. D., Spencer, C. M., & Moore, M. M. (2026). Weaponizing the bond: Pet abuse as a mediator of IPV victimization and mental health symptomology. *Psychosocial Intervention, 35,* Article e260821. https://doi.org/10.5093/pi2026a13

Australian Links Group Launches National Roadmap for Systemic Change

Lucy's Project in Australia tells *The LINK-Letter* that they have launched a National Roadmap for Change to Prevent and End Family Violence against People and Animals. The National Roadmap sets out 33 recommendations for systems change to improve the safety, wellbeing and recovery of people and animals experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV) across Australia.

CEO Monique Dam tells *The LINK-Letter* that the National Roadmap is informed by findings from the National Roundtable convened in 2025. The Roundtable brought together over 100 participants including people with lived experience, practitioners, advocates, researchers and policy makers.

Many of the Roundtable recommendations align to initiatives that have been implemented in Aotearoa New Zealand and the USA. Earlier this year, Lucy's Project's CEO undertook a Churchill Fellowship to learn more about these initiatives and the fellowship findings also informed the National Roadmap. The Roadmap's recommendations include:

Adopt a One Welfare approach to recognize that the safety and wellbeing of people and animals is interconnected. "Systems and services should respond to people and animals together, rather than expecting victim-survivors to navigate separate and disconnected systems."

Embed the leadership of people with lived experience and expertise throughout the design, implementation, governance, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs for people and animals experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV).

Deliver companion- and large-animal-inclusive DFV, homelessness and community services, accommodation, emergency and crisis care, and housing as a core component of client-centered, trauma-informed care, recognising and respecting the significant relationships people have with their animals.

Legal protections for animal victim-survivors of DFV, including legislation to enable courts to make family violence orders for animals as protected parties and victim-survivors of DFV in their own right, and to determine ownership of animals.

Make intake, risk assessment and safety planning animal-inclusive.

Fund DFV and animal welfare services to support people and animals to heal and recover and to maintain their relationship if they are temporarily unable to be housed together.

Promote school and community education and media reporting to increase understanding of: animals as family members and victim-survivors of DFV and the legal protections and support services available for people and animals.

Establish a framework for information sharing, cross-sector collaboration and cross-reporting about DFV and animal abuse between police and animal welfare law enforcement authorities, and improve research and reporting systems to collect data on DFV against animals.

Fund and resource behavior change programs for people who use DFV to address violence against animals, including harm, threats to harm, and neglect of animals.



Monique Dam

Establish and maintain a national directory of services that will support people with animals, including animal-inclusive DFV refuges.

Increase workforce and organizational capability across sectors including training and support services.

"The recommendations highlight the urgent need for policy, program and legislative changes across housing, justice, workforce capability, data collection, prevention and healing and recovery," the Roadmap concludes.

"The examples of initiatives from Aotearoa New Zealand, the USA and Canada demonstrate these reforms can be achieved. Initiatives in Australia should be responsive to local contexts and developed in partnership with victim-survivors, practitioners and leaders across the DFV, homelessness, community, animal welfare, animal management and veterinary sectors."

Lucy's Project launched the National Roadmap on August 19 at Australia's Parliament House, on Sept. 24 at the New South Wales Parliament House, and on Oct. 19 in Melbourne.

Lucy's Project was founded in 2013 as Australia's first Link organization. They have held several international conferences and established chapters in most states of Australia *(See the March 2018 and April 2025 LINK-Letters).*

Study Calls for One Welfare to Address Pets' Needs in Domestic Violence

While it is becoming increasingly more recognized in the U.S. that women with pets requiring crisis support at times of domestic violence face unique barriers, Australia still has limited pet-inclusive support services such as pet-friendly shelters (refuges) and animal fostering programs. As a result, women and their pets may be forced to separate, increasing psychological distress and trauma.

A follow-up study found that focus group participants reported that while the safety and well-being of pets should be central for victim-survivors, service responses are based on treating humans and animals as distinct entities rather than a unit.

Jasmine Montgomery, Zhanming Liang and Janice Lloyd, based at James Cook University in Queensland, conducted focus group discussions with professionals working in the domestic violence, homelessness, legal, and animal welfare sectors in Australia who provide crisis support to women and their pets. They identified two major themes exacerbating the adverse consequences of inadequate pet-focused crisis support for survivors:

- **"Complexities of pet-inclusive safety and recovery":** These affected the survivors, including animal-based coercive control, barriers to decision making, pet safety, housing and funding barriers, and inconsistent pet-inclusive responses;
- **"Working within the system":** These affected the agencies, including workforce fatigue, navigating legal channels, housing and funding barriers, and sharing responsibility across sectors.

They concluded that a national One Welfare approach must be implemented by which service responses must actively address the needs of pets in domestic violence situations. They propose a One Welfare Integrated Domestic Violence Framework that emphasizes collaboration across human and animal services, standardized pet-inclusive approaches, and recognition of pets as victims, in order to improve policy and service delivery.

They noted that survivors in rural areas face additional, complex and unique challenges, due to having a more diverse range of species, more animals, and limited access to services and resources. They cited another barrier in that pet-inclusive domestic violence shelters often do not advertise information about pets on their websites or provide alternative information about where to seek support for pets.



Jasmine Montgomery (left), Zhanming Liang and Janice Lloyd

The article is an extension of an earlier scoping review of 42 journal articles that established the research protocol and conceptual framework for the issues affecting people and their pets forced into homelessness by domestic violence, natural disasters, health, and housing issues (*See the April 2024 LINK-Letter).*

-- Montgomery, J., Liang, Z., & Lloyd, J. (2026). When safety requires separation: The consequences of inadequate pet-inclusive crisis support for women and pets fleeing domestic violence. *Journal of Family Violence,* https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-026-01170-6

Arkansas Animal Shelter Offers Safe Haven for Survivors' Pets

"It can save a life," Spencer Clawson, Public Works Director for Conway, Ark., told KARK-TV in describing Conway Animal Services' new sheltering service so domestic violence survivors can find safety without having to leave their animals behind.

The shelter has a new kennel space, painted a symbolic purple, representing that survivors can have their pets stay for up to 30 days while they seek new living arrangements. The animals are actually housed elsewhere for the pets' safety.

The program was started in 2025. Clawson said approximately 10 people have utilized the safe-sheltering service since its inception.

Pet Custody in Divorce Cases Being Examined in England and Wales

Family law interest in how the weaponization of animals – which are legally classified as property – in a divorce custody dispute – many of which are the result of domestic violence – has spread to England and Wales, where a new study examines how their laws treat companion animals following relationship breakdown. Although companion animals are increasingly regarded as family members, they remain legally classified as personal property, creating uncertainty over who should retain them and who is responsible for their care and expenses after separation.



Naomi Cousins, in the Department of Law and Criminology at the Royal Holloway University of London, writes that "Pets can still be weaponized as legal pawns in bitter litigation, and used as emotional blackmail as a tool for further perpetuation of abuse. There is a dire need for change and some guidance to help parties to amicably settle cases and avoid judicial intervention."

Cousins explores the growing recognition of "interspecies" families and argues that existing property law fails to reflect the emotional significance of companion animals. She considers whether family law principles could better address the realities of modern families and bridge the gap between companion animals' legal and emotional status.

> ***"Pets can still be weaponized as legal pawns in bitter litigation, and used as emotional blackmail as a tool for further perpetuation of abuse."***
> ***-- Naomi Cousins***

While there are no official figures to confirm the number of parties involved in custody disputes over their pets, anecdotal evidence from British lawyers suggests they are seeing an exponential increase in parties engaged in these disputes. Some 1 in 4 divorces are now reported to involve disputes over who will keep the family pet with reports suggesting a 37.5% increase in pet-custody cases between 2024 and 2025, partially a result of the aftermath of the "pandemic puppy" boom, she writes.

Despite a marked increase in pet-owning households in the UK, animal law is still only an emerging discipline and practice and courts lack the legal infrastructure to deal with pet custody disputes. "There is thus a cognitive dissonance between the deeply held emotions of pets as a family member with whom the family has a meaningful relationship, and their legal position merely as chattels," she adds.

"The family companion can be weaponized as a bargaining tool; a token of negotiation and even a tool for further perpetuating abuse."

-- Cousins, N. (2026): The evolving status of pets within familial relationships: can family law adapt to the new domestic reality?
Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law.
DOI: 10.1080/09649069.2026.274177

Montreal SPCA Asks to Include Pets' Well-Being in Marital Disputes

The Montreal SPCA is asking Quebec's new government to follow through on its commitment to animal welfare by prioritizing several issues, including requiring courts to consider animal welfare in family separation disputes, many of which result from domestic violence.

In congratulating Bernard Sévigny on his appointment as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, whose department is primarily responsible for animal welfare, the SPCA was encouraged that Quebec's new premier, Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, had highlighted the importance of animal welfare within the new minister's responsibilities during the swearing-in ceremony.

Plamondon, leader of the sovereigntist Parti Québécois, was sworn in as Quebec's 34th premier on Oct. 21. Other party commitments to animal welfare include minimum welfare standards for farmed animals, ending fur farming, and banning no-pet clauses in residential leases.

British Columbia is believed to be the only Canadian province that gives separating parties options to jointly own, share possession of or give exclusive ownership or possession of a companion animal to one of the spouses, after a court's consideration of such factors as: how the animal was acquired; how each spouse cared for it and has the willingness and ability to continue to care for it; any history or risk of family violence, cruelty or threats of cruelty toward an animal; and the relationship that any child involved has with the animal.

Veterinary Social Workers Can Address "The Other End of the Leash"

People working in or visiting a veterinary hospital may be carrying their experiences from a toxic environment with them. Veterinary Social Workers can influence change by working from within and helping to build relationships with the community.

That was the message offered by Michelle Lem describing the veterinary community outreach program she helped pioneer in Ottawa *(See the October 2016 LINK-Letter).* Delivering the keynote address at the 9th International Veterinary Work Summit in Toronto, Lem showcased opportunities that veterinary social workers can add to both the clinics and shelters where they work and to the people and animals they serve.

> ***"People share with you their life and their challenges. But veterinarians don't always have the skills to support the person at the other end of the leash."***
> ***-- Michelle Lem***

"Veterinary Social Workers occupy a very unique position," she said. They see people, animals, the veterinary team, and the clinic all as an interlocking system. People will talk openly to a veterinarian before they'll open up to other professionals.

"People share with you their life and their challenges. But veterinarians don't always have the skills to support the person at the other end of the leash," she noted.

This is where Veterinary Social Workers can help. Using the example of veterinary community outreach as an interlocking Link between the frameworks of One Health (veterinary medicine), Social Determinants of Health (Public Health), and People-In-Environment (social work), Lem sees Veterinary Social Work as an opportunity to help people in friendly settings where the novelty of the experience can enhance communications. "It helps us to reach people who would be otherwise difficult to reach."

Addressing domestic violence -- among both the staff and the clients -- is one component of veterinary social work outreach. "What can we do when someone is hurting or not resilient enough? What can we do to help them? We can ask what is happening around them.


Michelle Lem

"We can move them from recognizing the problem within them, to the problem going on outside them, and move them to action. When we see them we can strengthen them. We can make a connection that wasn't there before. You don't have to change the whole world to change someone's world."

AAVMC Addresses Abuse Recognition and Reporting as Core Wellbeing Competency

The American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) in September published a series of Wellbeing Competencies that includes veterinary medicine's responsibilities regarding suspected abuse and neglect as a core educational outcome in veterinary training.

The Competencies cite research that points toward complementary strengths-based and systems-informed approaches to proactively address wellbeing in the veterinary profession. AAVMC convened a task force in 2021 to support veterinary colleges in incorporating wellbeing training into formal DVM curricula. The new AAVMC Competencies directly align with the existing Competency-Based Veterinary Education (CBVE®) 2.0 Competency Framework to guide veterinary colleges in building, expanding, and assessing wellbeing curricula as part of competency-based veterinary education.

The Competencies serve as an essential mechanism for teaching, learning, clinical reasoning, communication, collaboration, professional identity formation, and sustainable practice. Two Competencies specifically address veterinary responses to suspected animal abuse:

CBVE DOMAIN 7: PROFESSIONALISM AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

CBVE Competency 7.1: Adopts an ethical approach to meeting professional obligations

7.1.2. Recognizes and responds to evidence of neglect and abuse.

CBVE DOMAIN 8: FINANCIAL AND PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

CBVE Competency 8.2: Delivers veterinary services compliant with legal and regulatory requirements

8.2.2. Acts in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements (e.g., reportable diseases, animal cruelty, waste disposal).

VETERINARY MEDICINE... and THE LINK

Veterinarians Are "Key Stakeholders" in Animal Cruelty Cases

"The veterinary examination is a key to establishing a pattern of behavior. it supports the charges, the consequences, and a pattern of behavior."

That was the advice offered by attorney Joyce Glass at the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Association's Compassionate Care Symposium. "Animal Abuse Basics and Beyond: Using a One Health Lens to Guide Recognition, Management and Treatment in Abuse Cases" focused on responsibilities and responses when animal cruelty and other family violence may be suspected.

Describing veterinarians as "key stakeholders" in animal cruelty cases, Glass called animal cruelty "a gateway crime to human crime. It's a crime of escalation."



Joyce Glass

She noted that women are the primary caregivers in homes marked by violence, that children exposed to domestic violence are three times more likely to be cruel to animals, and that animal cruelty rarely occurs in a vacuum. For female victims, speaking to the police is scary; however, they may speak to their veterinarian as a trusted source of information and support.

This trust factor extends to courtrooms where judges and juries give additional credence to a veterinarian's testimony due to the practitioner's expertise. "They don't believe that veterinarians inherently will make things up," she said. But to get a case into court, veterinarians must document their findings objectively and professionally.

There may be a breakdown after reporting suspected animal abuse. "There may be a reluctance to prosecute," she admitted, "but if you don't initiate the process you won't have a resolution."

She concluded, "Your involvement as a stakeholder in animal cruelty cases is key to the immediate victim and often extends to other animals and humans."

ANIMAL SEXUAL ABUSE... and THE LINK

Malaysian Psychologist Warns of Risks to Humans of Animal Sexual Abuse

The arrest of a man in Malaysia for alleged sexual abuse of a cat prompted a psychologist to warn that sexual abuse of animals may indicate serious problems with empathy and impulse control and could raise concerns about the risk of harm to other vulnerable victims, including people.

In an interview with the *Sun* newspaper, International Psychology Centre principal consultant psychologist Edward Chan noted that such behavior rarely stems from a single cause, but also rarely exists in a vacuum. "It often intersects paraphilic fixations, profound interpersonal deficits, or severe developmental trauma, where an animal becomes an accessible outlet for power, control, or sexual gratification," he said.



Edward Chan

Some perpetrators might have a sexual fixation on animals. Others with severe social anxiety, difficulties forming relationships or a history of victimization might target animals because they could not reject or retaliate, giving the perpetrator a sense of control. Intellectual disabilities, neurocognitive impairments, severe substance intoxication, or personality-related problems that affect impulse control and judgement can also be correlating factors.

Chan added the abuse of animals could be a warning sign of diminished empathy or antisocial or psychopathic traits, as perpetrators disregard the animal's fear, distress and pain. Citing Link research, Chan concluded that someone who rationalized harming a vulnerable animal might apply similar thinking to a vulnerable person.

However, rather than viewing it purely as an automatic 'stepping stone', clinicians should treat it as "a critical red flag that a person's behavioral boundaries, moral compass and impulse controls have already broken down significantly." Psychological intervention could help reduce repeat offending, but a structured forensic risk assessment and specialized treatment are indicated so treatment can be tailored to the person's risks and needs.

FBI Warns of Violent Online Networks Coercing Child and Animal Sex Abuse

The FBI is warning the public about a sharp increase in the activities of nihilistic and violent online networks which uses threats, blackmail and manipulation to coerce or extort victims into producing, sharing and live-streaming acts of animal cruelty, child and animal sexual abuse, self-harm, and suicide.

The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center began warning the public back in 2025 about these groups, sometimes referred to as "764". The numbers represent the last three digits of a Texas ZIP Code where one group originated. These groups' goals are to produce as many videos as possible; as this movement has evolved, some original members have reportedly been excluded for not disseminating enough videos.

These networks, which operate in the U.S. and around the globe, have a nihilistic objective of depicting violence in order to cause fear and chaos. Some actors, however, are motivated by other desires including sexual gratification, social status, a sense of belonging, or other reasons that may not be ideologically motivated, the FBI advises.

These networks methodically target and exploit minors, underage girls and other vulnerable individuals through threats, blackmail and manipulation. Victims are typically between the ages of 10 and 17 years old, but some victims are as young as 9. The FBI is said to believe the producer of the most number of these videos is a 13-year-old boy.

"These violent actors target vulnerable populations to include children as well as those who struggle with a variety of mental health issues, such as depression, eating disorders, or suicidal ideation," the FBI advises. "Threat actors often groom their 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."

The networks use extortion and blackmail tactics such as threatening to "swat" or "dox" their victims if they do not comply with the network's demands. These include producing child sexual abuse material and other videos depicting animal cruelty and such self-harm activities as cutting, stabbing, or "fansigning". The networks threaten to share the explicit photos or videos with victims' families, friends and the entire internet community.

The extreme fear that is instilled has even gone so far as to force the extorted victims to livestream their own suicide, either for the network's entertainment or to enhance the threat actor's sense of fame.

The FBI warns that these networks exist on public online platforms such as social media sites, gaming platforms and mobile apps commonly used by young people.

The alert urges the public to be increasingly vigilant for warning signs suggesting that an individual is being coerced into engaging in self-harm or having suicidal thoughts.

Warning signs include family pets or other animals being harmed or dying under suspicious circumstances or uncharacteristically avoiding or being fearful of a child.

Glossary of Terms

The FBI explains these terms:

"Swat" or "swatting" is the practice of making false emergency calls to police or other emergency services in an attempt to dispatch armed officers (such as a SWAT team) to a particular address.

"Dox" or "doxxing" is the act of obtaining and publishing personally identifiable information on the internet, usually for malicious intent.

"Fansigning" is writing or cutting specific numbers, letters, symbols, or names onto one's body. These may be carved with a blade, or written in blood or with a Sharpie.

"Care Becomes Compromised" in Animal Hoarding Cases

The One Health/One Welfare model is perfectly suited for addressing the complexities of animal hoarding cases which invariably require a multidisciplinary team to respond and resolve problematic cases often impacting dozens of animals and people. Each case is unique, social work or law enforcement may offer a better solution, recidivism rates are high, and a multidisciplinary team that includes veterinarians is exceptionally important and offers the best opportunity to improve both animal and human welfare.



Sandra Strong

That was the advice offered by Sandra Strong, telling the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Association's Compassionate Care Symposium that veterinary involvement is essential. "We are the ones who are going to see these cases," she said. "It's a human-animal bond situation where animals take the place of human relationships."

We all collect stuff, she noted, but it's only when it becomes overwhelming or interferes with daily life that it becomes an issue. She cited seminal research by Gary Patronek and Jane Nathanson describing how five domains contribute to an animal's welfare: Nutrition, Ther Environment, Health, and Opportunity, all of which affect the animal's Mental State.

Animal hoarders continually and obsessively accumulate animals, they fail to provide care and to recognize that there is a problem, and they persist in their collecting despite interventions. Strong listed "red flags" that should cause veterinarians to suspect that a client is an animal hoarder:

- "Vet shopping," taking animals to multiple practices in an effort to avoid raising suspicions;
- Having many different animals;
- Clients who smell bad;
- Many different animals with the same name, or with no names;
- Clients can't recall a basic history of an animal;
- Animals that lack basic care;
- A frequent change of address.

Strong described her work in adding animal hoarding to an existing object hoarding task force in Orange County, N.C. that included county Animal Services as well as Aging Services and Adult Protective Services. Animal hoarding cases can involve multiple humane and human services agencies and crisis counselors to address:

- Animal cruelty and neglect;
- Elder neglect;
- Child neglect;
- Presence of garbage, odor and rodents;
- Fire code violations;
- Physical risks and mental health issues of residents

Strong described the collaborative and proactive model for managing animal hoarding cases in Wake County, N.C. *(See the July 2019 LINK-Letter)* that utilized a team-based approach to assist animals at risk, hold people accountable, address the mental health component of the problem, and create a more humane community. The team included veterinarians and technicians, animal control officers, crisis intervention counselors, law enforcement officers, and animal rescue partners. She concluded that a diverse team approach can best address the animal and human welfare challenges and environmental concerns associated with animal hoarding.

Recognizing that the capacity to intervene in animal hoarding cases varies widely from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, Strong advised veterinarians to get involved early before the number of animals involved that will suffer becomes too overwhelming. Detailed notes in writing and updated accounts of the costs incurred are essential. And veterinarians need to collaborate with the other agencies involved.

"We're all interconnected," she concluded. "That's the One Health/One Welfare model."



Preventing Animal Hoarding through Cross-Sector, Less Punitive Systems: A One Health Approach

Is there a solution to the normally intractable challenge of an animal hoarding case?

The team at the Humane Society of Greater Dayton, Ohio, have developed a four-stage process of early intervention that takes time and money now but saves even greater time and money later while minimizing the stressors on the people, animals and organizations involved.



Mandy Combs & Kristina Hill

Kristina Hill and Mandy Combs described the outreach at the 9th International Veterinary Work Summit. After expensive hoarding cases taxed the shelter's capacity and resources, they developed an early trauma-informed and cross-sector intervention program to prevent cases from escalating. "Prevention requires identifying the point(s) where support can still change the trajectory," said Hill.

A key is to take a collaborative, One Health, less punitive approach and differentiate between an overwhelmed caregiver and a true animal hoarder. By identifying the early signs of caregiver burnout, communicating openly and offering resources that address the caregiver's stressors without exacerbating the fear or shame they may be experiencing, shelters can support and build increased trust across the veterinary, humane enforcement and social work sectors.

The traditional view sees animal hoarding as driven by a deep-seated psychological pathology or malicious intent, said Hill. This results in a "silent accumulation of animals behind closed doors" and an emphasis on enforcement and forcible removal of the animals that traumatizes the caregiver and the animals, strains the shelter's capacity, breaks the caregiver's trust in the system, and only leads to repeating the cycle over and over.

The real fallout from this approach, said Combs, is that the animals face stress, behavioral declines, and a risk of exposure to disease or being euthanized in the shelter. The shelter has to absorb "astronomical" financial costs and increased workloads and trauma while treating the symptoms instead of the root causes. "When your goal is simply to save the animals, and you wind up having to euthanize them, it's extremely stressful on staff. It's our worst nightmare."

A One Health perspective, however, addresses the barriers instead of punishing the problem. It recognizes that the animals' caregiver is experiencing burnout, extreme social isolation, unmanaged poverty, and grief, and is amenable to collaborative solutions that address resource gaps. It recognizes that hoarders may be experiencing shame, isolation and a crippling fear of judgment and legal penalties that is blocking their self-healing.

Many of the animals are the result of unplanned breeding resulting from misinformation about pet population control and lack of access to affordable spay/neuter programs, they explained. Factors that conspire to overwhelm caregivers include their deep love of animals, a

(Continued on Page 15)

HUMANE SOCIETY OF GREATER DAYTON'S 4-STAGE FRAMEWORK

Relying on information from the caregivers or individuals who observe the situation, the Society uses a 4-stage framework of intervention:

Level 1 (Supportive Prevention) begins when the number of animals is still manageable and gaps in the animals' care are just starting to emerge. By offering access to spay/neuter and veterinary services, pet food and education, shelters can stabilize the individual's capacity to care for an acceptable number of animals before conditions deteriorate.

Level 2 (Early Intervention) occurs when the numbers are increasing and sanitation concerns are becoming problematic. By offering "warm referrals" and coordinated veterinary and social services responses, with concrete short-term goals, shelters can interrupt the pattern of escalation and deterioration while preserving the animals' welfare and the caregivers' dignity. "You can still get financial buy-in from the owner at this stage," noted Combs.

Level 3 (Intensive Support) kicks in when there are significant concerns about the animals' or caregivers' welfare, the environment is unsafe, the caregiver's needs are complex, and repeated interventions have failed. In these situations a case leader -- such as a Veterinary Social Worker -- is defined to coordinate cross-system services in order to reduce the immediate risk and create a sustainable care plan.

Level 4 (Protective Action) only occurs when immediate danger is evident, legal thresholds have been crossed and removal of the animals and veterinary care become necessary. The goal is to protect both the animals and people while maintaining a pathway for follow-up at 30, 60 and 90 days and preventing recidivism. "The truth is we don't have the capacity to handle all the Level 4 cases, so there's no benefit to not starting to intervene earlier," said Combs.

A One Health Approach To Animal Hoarding

(Continued from Page 14)

belief that no one else is capable of caring for them, limited veterinary access, and living situations complicated by poverty, isolation, and housing instability.

A client advocate who can tell the hoarder that the shelter wants to help them and their animals makes a difference. "The outcome is very different when the person knows they're being heard and seen and that their candor is appreciated," said Hill.

These cases will always cost shelters money; but by documenting how much the shelter can save by intervening early rather than caring for a large influx of hoarding victims, shelters can realize a cost benefit. "You're going to be financially responsible eventually," Combs said.

With early recognition and prevention, overwhelmed caregivers may be willing to ask for help, be open to problem-solving, accept support, and follow a care plan.

"I want our clients to know that they can come to us for help," said Hill. "I tell them that I'm willing to give you the resources that you're willing to receive. They'll go straight to Level 4 if we close the door on them."

"If you give them a solution that works within their cultural parameters and give them an opportunity to come back to you later, you keep the conversation flowing and you leave the door open for them," concluded Combs. "Convince them that they -- and their animals - are at risk and that you want to help them mitigate that risk."

Rural Veterinarians Are Highly Likely to Encounter Animal Hoarders

Veterinarians working in community settings are likely to encounter cases of animal hoarding and should consider collaborating with mental health practitioners if repeated incidences of negative health-care indicators occur for animals from the same household.

That was the conclusion drawn from a retrospective 10-year study in rural Mississippi of 6,440 owners who reported having eight or more animals. Increased animal ownership in the home correlated with worse health outcomes for the dogs and cats involved, the authors reported.

Noting that animal hoarding tends to be more severe in nature in rural contexts, likely due to decreased visibility of the problem, the researchers used data from a university-based community clinic at Mississippi State University to determine patterns of animal ownership in a rural setting and possible health-care–based indicators of animal hoarding.

They hypothesized that increased numbers of animals would be associated with decreased positive indicators of animal care (e.g., number of clinic visits, spay/neuter status, annual checkup, dental visit, and vaccine count) and increased negative indicators of animal health (e.g., total physical problems recorded as well as problems specifically noted for skin, hydration, and mammary glands). They also hoped to provide preliminary estimates of the prevalence of possible animal hoarding in rural Mississippi.



Mary Dozier



Ben Porter



Jacob Shivley

The results signified the need for increased collaboration between veterinarians and mental health practitioners. They estimated that 2.4% of dogs and 4.3% of cats live in a household with eight or more 8 animals, a level Linked with decreased health care for the animal.

"Thus, veterinarians working in community settings are likely to encounter such cases and should be equipped with the knowledge and skill to achieve positive health outcomes for both the animals and owners in these situations," they concluded. "We recommend veterinarians reach out to local mental health professionals in their area to determine possible referral networks.

"Animal hoarding cases typically take years to get to the point of legal intervention and animal removal. Early intervention is key to rehabilitating animals that have been in hoarded houses, both in terms of their physical needs as well as behavioral problems that may have developed."

-- Dozier, M.E., Porter, B., Shivley, J.M., & Telle, M.R. (2023). Increased animal ownership is correlated with worse health outcomes based on health-care indicators investigated in canines and felines in rural Mississippi. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, 261*(7), 1-6. DOI: 10.2460/javma.22.12.0589

NCJFCJ and ALDF Hosting 3rd Judicial Institute on The Link

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) is inviting applications for its 3rd Judicial Institute on the Human-Animal Bond and the LINK Between Animal Cruelty and Interpersonal Violence: Issues in Family Law Cases. The Institute is being offered by the NCJFCJ in collaboration with the Animal Legal Defense Fund and the George Washington University Law School. It will be held May 18-19, 2027 at the George Washington University Law School in Washington, D.C.

The 2-day in-person Judicial Institute is designed for judicial officers who handle juvenile and family law matters and have a strong interest in learning about recommended practices for addressing companion animal welfare issues that arise in the context of domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, juvenile justice, divorce, and child custody cases. The Institute will provide a hands-on understanding and application of the seminal publication by the NCJFCJ and the ALDF, *Animal Cruelty Issues: What Juvenile and Family Court judges Need to Know.*

There is no registration fee and travel scholarships are available. Application responses will be used to determine acceptance to the Institute and to allocate scholarship funding.

For questions about the Institute, please feel welcome to contact Michele Walk, NCJFCJ Senior Program Manager,

Eryn Branch Named CEO of NCJFCJ

The National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges has announced that Eryn Jane Branch – whose many accomplishments include having served on the National Link Coalition's Advisory Committee -- has been named the organization's next chief executive officer, following a national search. Branch previously served as co-director of the NCJFCJ's Family Violence and Domestic Relations Program.

"The NCJFCJ Board of Directors is pleased to welcome Eryn as our next CEO," said Judge Amanda N. Heath, NCJFCJ president. "Eryn's deep expertise in domestic violence work, her steady leadership of our Family Violence and Domestic Relations Program, and her long record of building strong, sustainable initiatives make her well prepared to lead the NCJFCJ into its next chapter. We are confident in her vision for our members, our courts, and the children and families we serve."


Eryn Branch

Branch succeeds Joey Orduna Hastings, who retired earlier this year for personal reasons.

Branch holds more than a decade of leadership experience within NCJFCJ, beginning in 2012 as a senior policy analyst and in 2014 as director of the Family Violence and Domestic Relations Program, where she oversaw national curricula and training institutes, multidisciplinary court improvement projects, publications and website development, and grant proposals designed to meet the needs of the judiciary.

The NCJFCJ Family Violence and Domestic Relations Program has grown significantly, securing new awards, expanding staff, and launching partnerships in emerging topic areas such as behavioral health, firearms violence and The Link. Her work has centered the needs of court-involved families and reflected a deep appreciation for the judges and communities working every day to improve the lives of children and families who seek justice.

Branch holds a bachelor's degree in English from the University of California, Davis and a master's degree in English from the University of Nevada, Reno.

THE COURTS... and THE LINK

NCJFCJ Custody/Visitation Bench Card References The Link

In addition to the 11 state-specific bench cards that the National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges has developed to assist courts in addressing Link Issues, the NCJFCJ has made reference to animal-related issues in a separate bench card addressing custody and visitation decisions in domestic violence cases.

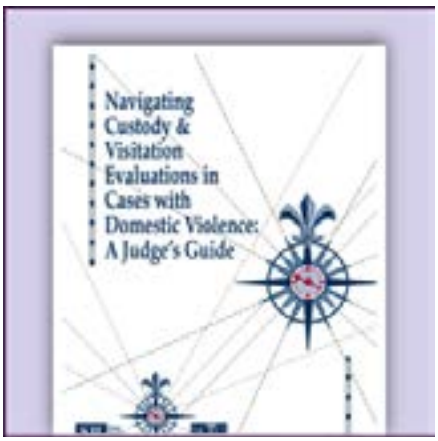
NCJFCJ notes that research has found that judges presiding over contested custody cases often have to grapple with two related questions:

- whether one parent has been physically violent or otherwise abusive to the other, and, if so,
- how that violence or abuse should affect the court's decisions about ongoing custody and visitation arrangements.

As a result, *Navigating Custody & Visitation Evaluations in Cases with Domestic Violence: A Judge's Guide* was designed to help judges determine whether ordering an evaluation is appropriate and, if so, how to gather, analyze and synthesize the relevant evidence to facilitate decision making. The *Guide* addresses not just cases in which there is a record of domestic violence, but also cases in which domestic violence is alleged, or where the presence of other "red flags" raises a suspicion of domestic violence. Three references to animal abuse as potential "red flags" are noted in the *Guide:*

The section **Is There a Need for an Emergency/ Interim Assessment?** emphasizes that "If a case seems dangerous from the outset, and if the situation has not already been stabilized, you may need to take immediate action." The accompanying Worksheet lists factors that might prompt an emergency/interim safety assessment, including "evidence of harm or threats of harm to partner or children, or threats of harm to pets or property."

In the **Worksheet for Once Safety Is Assessed and If Resources Are Available, Should I Order an Evaluation?,** the *Guide* says "The answer may be YES when there are allega-



tions that a parent has harmed or threatened to harm him- or herself or the other parent or the children, threatened injury to property or pets, or otherwise abused the other parent or the children."

Under **Be Specific about the Information You Need,** the *Guide* advises judges that "Although the particular areas of inquiry may differ from case to case, areas that are usually important in a case in which domestic violence has or may have occurred, and that you will want to direct the expert to inquire into, include... destruction of property or abuse of pets or threats to do so.

NEWS from LINK COALITIONS

Links Group UK Chair Honored



Paula Boyden

Veterinarian Paula Boyden, who chairs our British counterpart The Links Group UK, was honored this summer with an Honorary Degree of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery from the University of Edinburgh "in recognition of her exceptional leadership in canine welfare and veterinary science, nationally and internationally."

Paula served as Veterinary Director of the Dogs trust charity from 2011-2025. She was recognized in particular for her leadership in developing the Freedom Project, which offers temporary fostering services for pets of individuals escaping domestic violence, and Hope Project, which provides veterinary care for dogs belonging to homeless people and those in housing crisis.

Paula was graduated from the Royal Veterinary College and spent 11 years in general practice before moving into industry and NGO work. She has been instrumental in the Links Group UK since its inception.

THE LINK... in the LITERATURE

Pets Can Be Both "Targets of Harm" and "Healers of Hurt"

Andrew Campbell's latest exploration of the positive and negative aspects of the human-animal bond describes companion animals as simultaneously "targets of harm" and "healers of hurt" in family violence situations. His latest book – aimed more at the general public than professional audiences – sheds new light on the complex dynamics of The Link.

He provides brief overviews of child, domestic, elder and pet abuse and how they can involve companion animals. For example, domestic violence abusers harm animals to "change things up" to help further their control of the home environment and to squash any hopes the victims may have of a successful escape.

Campbell emphasizes how pets can fill an emotional void and provide support for family violence victims who may come to trust animals more than other humans. He describes a symbiotic relationship in abusive households where people and animals come to depend on each other for emotional support; animals, like people, can experience both emotional and physical hurt.

"Pets offer a critical contrast to the lies of abuse. Amidst chaos, stress and hurt, pets can permit victims to see, and in time come to believe, that good does exist and that they DO have value and worth." Meanwhile, the person also gains a greater sense of purpose for needing to care for the animals.

He notes, however, that these relationships can actually become more stressful if, for example, the cost of care or the absence of a pet-friendly shelter makes the caregiving relationship untenable. This can add to the victim's emotional burden and affect the caregiver's internal sense of worth. He urges domestic violence shelters that cannot yet provide facilities for survivors' pets to at least consider introducing animal-assisted therapy programs.

He cautions that pets should not be seen as a victim's sole source of a "safe space" and that "the human-animal bond should never be viewed as a permanent fix for victims of abuse."

Writing from personal experience, Campbell emphasizes the child-pet bond in abusive homes. "Children who grow up in an abusive home can quickly learn to see the world as an unsteady and dangerous place," he writes. "They may be less likely to form healthy, secure attachments to their caregivers. Children are unlikely to find a sense of emotional safety or security from an abusive adult in the home. When one's early, core relationships are unhealthy, those that follow are likely to be affected."

He describes multiple reasons why children harm animals and, conversely, how animal-assisted interventions can help incarcerated juvenile offenders.

He devotes a chapter to the emotional turmoil of forced separation from pets during natural disasters – which also increase the risk of family violence. "Reform is needed to ensure that pets are included in family violence safety planning just as they are included in natural disaster safety planning," he urges. "We must protect pets to best protect the humans who are connected to them."



Campbell reviews his earlier research *(See the December 2024 LINK-Letter)* that the already-grave risk to first responders at domestic violence scenes doubles when animal cruelty is added into the equation.

He concludes with a call to recognize that the animal abuse/family violence Link rarely remains within the home and can become a community issue. "Animal cruelty prevalence may be an important estimator of overall community health and well-being," he concludes. "The quality of life experienced by the most vulnerable members of the population can sometimes indicate the overall direction of the community.

"When we fail to protect its most vulnerable members, the entire community becomes more vulnerable. While patterns of abuse, harm and violence begin in the home, they don't long remain there. Communities protect people by protecting pets."

Campbell, A. (2026). *Targets of Harm, Healers of Hurt: Pets and Family Violence.*
www.campbellresearchandconsulting.com

THE LINK... in the LITERATURE

Study Examines DV Survivors' Perceptions of their Abusers' Motivations for Harming Animals

We've long known that abusers harm or threaten animals as coercive control over their domestic violence partners. But how do the survivors perceive their abusers' motivations for attacking the animals? A new study has identified five main themes: poor mental health/ trauma; power and control over the partner; disciplining the animal; personality traits/characteristics; and power and control over the animal. An additional 22 sub-themes were identified, including: issues with emotional regulation; attempts to punish or hurt the partner; asserting dominance; a lack of empathy; forgetting; a history of past trauma; fear or dislike of the animal; evilness or cruelty; laziness; being busy and prioritizing other things, and drugs/alcohol.

The study interviewed 333 individuals who identified acts of animal maltreatment by their current or most recent romantic partner

"These findings largely align with extant literature and highlight a need to address underlying psychological distress or maladaptive coping techniques of those who may be at risk to abuse animals," the researchers concluded. "In addition to the importance of mental health treatment for individuals who are at risk to hurt or have mistreated animals, the results from the study also highlight the necessity for mental health professionals to include animal abuse in their screening and assessments" – particularly when screening for domestic violence.

"Taken together, the implications from this study suggest that preventing animal maltreatment requires a comprehensive, multilevel approach, including addressing mental health concerns, ensuring protections for both animals and humans in abusive situations, education and training on humane training practices, and empathy development in order to reduce the risk of harm for both animals and humans."

-- Moore, M.D., Renken, N.D., & Spencer, C.M. (2026). A reflexive thematic analysis of partners' perceived motivations of their partner's animal abuse. *Anthrozoös, 39*(5), 947-963. DOI: 10.1080/08927936.2026.2708481

Response to "Vicarious Violence" in Spain and Brazil

A new study compares how the legal systems in Brazil and Spain address"vicarious violence". Spain stands out for the "civil de-patrimonialization" of animals through Ley 17/2021 and integrating animal welfare into gender-based violence frameworks. Brazil has advanced with Law No. 15.384/2026, which posited vicarious violence, and Law No. 15.392/2026, which prohibited shared custody of pets in scenarios of intrafamily risk.

The authors conclude that characterizing domestic violence against animals and the consequent protection of victims depend on overcoming analytical fragmentation and implementing integrated veterinary forensic protocols into the criminal justice system, providing indispensable technical support for prosecutors and the judiciary.

- De Freitas Batista, N.F., & dos Santos, C.L. (2026). Violência vicária contra animais domésticos: Um paralelo médico-jurídico entre Espanha e Brasil. *Revista de Vitimologia e Justiça Restaurativa, 4*(2). doi/10.58725/rivjr.v2i2.204

Link Helps Veterinary Forensics Advance in South Korea

A study from South Korea cites how animal abuse is recognized as a significant public safety issue because "it is intrinsically linked to interpersonal violence" and "perpetrators of animal abuse exhibit a higher propensity to commit violent crimes against humans" in explaining the need for a study of animal cruelty cases. The report provides an important foundation for advancing veterinary forensics in South Korea and offers a standardized framework for future animal welfare policies and comparative forensic research.

The authors retrospectively analyzed 440 canine and 785 feline fatalities that had been submitted over a five-year period. Consistent with comparable studies, blunt force trauma was the most frequent cause of unnatural death in both dogs and cats. Because firearms regulations are strict in South Korea, only a single gunshot fatality was recorded.

They hoped that the report will catalyze the development of veterinary forensics in South Korea, while providing a strategic foothold for fostering future academic collaboration with neighboring countries.

-- Kim, A.-Y., Baek, J., Moon, N., Hwang, M.-H., & Jeoung, H.-Y., et al. (2026). Veterinary forensic findings in suspected dog and cat abuse cases in South Korea, 2019-2023. *Journal of Veterinary Science, 27*(6):e81. https://doi.org/10.4142/jvs.26103

Call for Veterinary Social Work Papers Includes Link Articles

The Center for Veterinary Social Work at the University of Tennessee – Knoxville has issued a Call for Papers for a special open-access issue of *Human-Animal Interactions* that will be devoted to Veterinary Social Work: Advancing Research, Practice, Education, and Policy.

The issue, which will be edited by Shelby McDonald and Zenithson Ng, welcomes research, practice, education, and policy papers on topics like the intersection of harm to humans and animals including interpersonal violence, animal maltreatment, and their co-occurrence. Other topics to be addressed include: grief and end-of-life care; professional well-being; access to care and housing for multispecies families; One Health and One Welfare approaches with explicit relevance to social work; and equity in animal-serving systems.





Shelby McDonald (left) and Zenithson Ng

The editors welcome contributions addressing the field's established areas as well as scholarship examining emerging populations, settings, social conditions, and systems relevant to Veterinary Social Work. The Special Issue is intended both to strengthen the evidence supporting current Veterinary Social Work practice and to advance scholarship that can inform the field's continued development.

Submissions should articulate implications for social work practice, veterinary or animal-serving systems, interdisciplinary service delivery, education, intervention, or policy rather than addressing human–animal relationships in isolation.

Six fully funded APC waivers are available, sponsored by the RISE HAI Lab, with priority for students, trainees, practitioners, and early-career authors.

The deadlines for submission are March 1, 2027 for waiver consideration, or the final deadline of Aug. 31, 2027. Details are available at the journal issue's website.

Human-Directed Aggression Discovered Among Indian Dairy Cattle Workers

While most Link literature focuses on companion animals, a new study from India raises provocative points about human-directed aggression among individuals who engage in cruelty to dairy cattle. The study compared 45 dairy operation owners and employees in nine facilities against a control group of 45 non-dairy workers under the same geographic and socioeconomic conditions. The findings indicate that individuals engaged in dairy operations have a higher propensity for human-directed aggression – including physical and verbal aggression, hostility and anger -- than those not involved in dairy operations.

Furthermore, all dairy sites showed signs of animal cruelty according to an Animal Cruelty Checklist, highlighting an association between animal cruelty and elevated aggression among the operators involved in dairy operations.

They note a "major research gap" of limited Link research in India in general, and specific research about The Link in the dairy cattle industry. India has the world's largest population of dairy cattle, with 192.49 million cows and 109.85 million buffaloes. The authors emphasize that a large proportion of dairy cattle in India are exposed to cruel conditions including overcrowding, heat stress, and inadequate housing and feeding, leading to severe physiological distress.

The authors cite several theories within the construct that inflicting violence on animals is an indicator of psychological and behavioral issues. They add that "Cruelty to animals is a global issue which has major implications for animal welfare, individual welfare, and societal welfare."

-- Sibal, S., Raj Sharma, U., & Singh, S. (2026). Are individuals who engage in cruelty to dairy cattle more likely to exhibit human-directed aggression? *Natural Resources for Human Health, 6*(16s), 1506-1518.

Raising GLOBAL LINK AWARENESS

The Links Group UK Raises Awareness of Equine Link Issues in Northern Ireland

Awareness of how coercive control in domestic violence can include equine scenarios as well as household pets took a major leap forward in Northern Ireland in September when our counterpart The Links Group UK partnered with the British Horse Society for an information session and workshop for the equestrian sector.

Over 160 participants attended "Safeguarding in the Equine sector: Coercive Control, Communities, Countryside, Challenges, and Collaboration" at the Riding for the Disabled Association yard in Coleraine. Speakers included the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, the High Sheriff, the Deputy Mayor, and representatives from the Executive Office, academia, safeguarding, and animal welfare. Exhibitors from child welfare, domestic and sexual abuse, animal welfare, guide dogs, and veterinarians complemented the spirit of community collaboration.

The Links Group trustee David Martin, presenting "Protecting Animals, Protecting People," described how non-accidental injury can look differently in the countryside in horses, farm animals and wildlife. He discussed The Link between sexual abuse of animals and of children and how Northern Ireland's legislative systems could address this issue. The Links Group's Andrea Lynch explained how easy it could be for an abusive person to manipulate a participant in a therapeutic riding center.



"We had hoped that by immersing the audience in the equestrian world, the messages would be more relevant and easier to recall, and from the feedback to date, it looks like it worked!" Lynch tells *The LINK-Letter.*

Don't Forget The Pets Offers Concise Link Summary

Don't Forget the Pets has posted a web page summarizing a Link presentation that highlights both the bright and dark sides of the human-animal bond.

Emily Lewis and Kathleen Wood from the Animal Legal Defense Fund had presented "Protecting All Victims: How the Law Addresses Animal Abuse, Family Safety, and Professional Reporting."

Their presentation described: the human-animal bond; Links with domestic violence; Links to child maltreatment and elder abuse; and motivations affecting juvenile animal abusers.

They described state laws affecting pet protection orders, defining animal cruelty as domestic violence or stalking, mandatory cross-reporting, and the distinctions between felonies and misdemeanors.



Emily Lewis, left, and Kathleen Wood

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.

LEGISLATION... and THE LINK

Most state legislatures have already adjourned or are on summer break. As 2026 sessions head into the final stretch, we're still following 218 LINK-related measures -- 24 of which have been signed into law. 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 processionals**
- **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. 8723, the Fighting Inhumane Gambling and High-risk Trafficking Act of 2026" or the "FIGHT Act of 2026", would prohibit gambling on animal fighting and sponsoring, exhibiting, or causing a minor under age 16 to attend an animal fight.

H.R. 8911 and **S. 4562, the Animal Violence Exposes Real Threat of Future Violence Act (AVERT 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 requires 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 was declared inactive. It would have required the Department of Social Services to develop a standardized curriculum for mandated reporters of child abuse, which include animal control officers.

SUCCESS!! SB 1276 extends 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. It also broadens the responsibilities of mandated reporters of child abuse, which includes animal care and control officers, to report cases of digitally altered or A.I.-generated matter that depicts a person under age 18 engaged in an act of sexual conduct.

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

SUCCESS!! House Substitute Bill for HB 415 requires 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 will 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 on any cock for the purpose of fighting.

HAWAI'I

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."

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 misdemeanant 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.

SUCCESS!! HB 4540, the "Companion Animal Custody Equity Act," will enable courts to 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.

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 became effective Aug. 1.

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 died when the General Court adjourned.** They would have allowed 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 died when the General Court adjourned. It would have updated 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 died when the General Court adjourned. It would have would have made 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 have been required to participate in psychiatric rehabilitation under a psychologist who specializes in bullying. The family could have been prohibited from having any unsupervised contact with animals and all current animals would be relocated to foster care.

MICHIGAN

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

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

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

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

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

SUCCESS!! **HB 1839 and HB 2921** wILL impose civil penalties on commercial entities that allow minors to access harmful sexual material, including bestiality, online.

SUCCESS!! **HB 2292** and **SB 899** will 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 will be required to report suspected animal abuse to a Missouri Animal Control Association hotline. All reporters will be exempt from civil and criminal liability for good-faith reporting. Reporters will 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.

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 was held over for interim study. It would have required 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.

SUCCESS!! HB 1522 expands the definition of domestic violence abuse (which already includes acts of animal cruelty) to add "coercive control". Coercive control includes acts intended to threaten, intimidate, harass, isolate, coerce, control, or compel compliance of a petitioner to reasonably fear for their physical safety, including harming, or threating 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 3524 and **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 control by an abuser.

A 3809 and **S 1150** would revise the statutory definiton of domestic violence to include "psychological abuse that causes fear or serious alarm or distress that has a substantial adverse impact on a person's daily activities." While acts of harm or threats to animals are not specified, they are now widely considered means of coercive control.

A 5459, "Moksha's Law," would allow courts to award compensatory damages to the owner of a service animal, emotional support animal or companion animal in a civil action arising from the animal's death. Damages could include veterinary and burial expenses and the animal's fair market value.

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 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

S 274 died when the legislature adjourned. It would have replaced the "crime against nature" with the term "bestiality".

S 573 died when the legislature adjourned. It would have defined 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 have required individuals convicted of companion animal hoarding to undergo psychological evaluation and treatment.

S 591 died when the legislature adjuorned. It would have prohibited 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.

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 Assemble 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 make it illegal to expose children to sexual activity, which includes bestiality, that is present in only part of materials. Currently, such acts must comprise the totality of the materials.

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 has determined that the home is safe for both the child and the animal and a joint safety plan for both has 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.

Permission to Reprint

The news items contained in The LINK-Letter are intended to be disseminated as widely and as freely as possible information about the connections between animal abuse and interpersonal violence.

Permission is hereby granted to re-post these articles in newsletters, websites, magazines, and electronic publications provided that appropriate credit is given to the National Link Coalition and with hyperlinks to www.nationallinkcoalition.org.

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.

HELP US KEEP THE LINK FREE!



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 all our web resources free of charge.

But we can continue to do that ONLY with your help. Please support our work and click here to make a tax-deductible donation to the National Link Coalition. THANK YOU!

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 CALENDAR

Nov. 9 -- Harrisburg, Pa. (online): The Pennsylvania Bar Institute will conduct a CLE-eligible webcast on "Paws and Laws: Exploring the Legal Landscape for Pet Owners." Panel discussions will include the treatment of pets in custody and divorce matters and including companion animals in Pennsylvania's Protection From Abuse Act.

Nov. 10 -- S. Padre Island, Texas: Makayla Moore will present "Silent Victims, Shared Violence: A Trauma-Informed Approach to Animal and Human Abuse" at the Texas Animal Control Association's 52nd Annual Conference.

Nov. 12 -- Pittsburgh, Pa.: Don't Forget the Pets wull hold a free in-person training workshop on how to create and sustain pet housing programs for survivors of domestic violence and people experiencing homelessness.

Nov. 19 -- Syracuse, N.Y. (in-person and online): The Syracuse University College of Law will host a CLE panel event, "Understanding the Link between Animal Abuse & Family Violence".

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. 5 -- Houston, Texas: Phil Arkow will speak to the Texas Humane Legislation Network.

Dec. 5 -- Tokyo, JAPAN: Sakiko Yamazaki of the Animal Literacy Research Institute will present a webinar on "Applying the LINK to Addressing Perpetrators of Animal Abuse: Better Tackling Animal Abuse Cases as a Society".

Dec. 8 -- Raleigh, N. Car (online): Phil Arkow will present "Another One Health Role for Veterinarians: Response to Animal Cruelty and Other Family Violence" in a veterinary forensics selective webinar for the NCSU College of Veterinary Medicine.

Dec. 9 — Pennsylvania (online): The Keystone Link Coalition will hold its regular bi-monthly meeting.

Jan. 19, 2027 -- Orlando, Fla.: Jennifer Bonovich will present "Veterinary Forensics for the Shelter Veterinarian" and "Animal Neglect: Recognizing, Documenting, and Treating Animal Neglect and Abuse Cases From a Forensic Viewpoint" at the NAVC/VMX Veterinary Conference and Expo.

Jan. 21, 2027 -- Colorado Springs, Colo. (online): Nina Stively of Loudoun County., Va. Animal services will present "How Many is Too Many? Animal Hoarding Cases A(doption) to Z(oonoses) in a webinar for the Justice Clearinghouse.

Jan. 25-27, 2027 -- Atlanta, Ga.: The NACA ACO Level II Training tour program will include such topics as animal hoarding, animal fighting, and the ACO as first responder.

March 4, 2027 -- Colorado Springs, Colo. (online): Betsy Biffl will present "Cross-Reporting Laws and Why They Matter" in a webinar for the Justice Clearinghouse.

March 8-10, 2027 -- Moore, Okla.: The NACA ACO Level II Training tour program will include such topics as animal hoarding, animal fighting, and the ACO as first responder.

LINK TRAINING CALENDAR



March 14, 2027 — Portland, Ore.: Phil Arkow will present "Protecting Woman's Best Friend: Assessing the Impact of 'Animal-Inclusive Protection Orders'" as part of a panel discussion on "Protecting Animals & People" at the Animal Legal Defense Fund's 35th Annual Animal Law Conference.

March 22-25, 2027 -- Huntsville, Ala.: Claire Coughlin will be among the speakers presenting on The Link at the National Children's Advocacy Center's 43rd International Symposium on Child Abuse.

March 25, 2027 -- (online): Phil Arkow will present "Another One Health/One Welfare Role for Veterinarians: Responding to Animal Cruelty and Other Family Violence" in a webinar for the Justice Clearinghouse.

April 20-22, 2027 -- Ridgewood, N.Y. (online): My Dog Is My Home will hold its annual virtual conference.

May 12-14, 2027 -- St. Petersburg Beach, Fla.: Animal ForensiCon -- The Animal Forensic Investigations Conference -- will offer workshops and educational sessions on a wide variety of topics about animal cruelty investigations, law, and animal forensic science.

May 18-19, 2027 -- Washington, D.C.: The National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges and the Animal Legal Defense Fund will conduct the Judicial Institute on the Human-Animal Bond and the LINK Between Animal Cruelty and Interpersonal Violence.

June 15-19, 2027 -- Baltimore, Md.: The International Veterinary Forensic Sciences Association will hold its 20th Anniversary Annual Conference.

Sept. 10, 2027 -- Albuquerque, N. Mex: Positive Links New Mexico will hold its conference on "Exposing the Link between Animal Abuse & Domestic Violence." Phil Arkow will present "'DV and the DVM': Engaging Veterinarians in the Response to Domestic Violence."

THE LINK... in the NEWS -- Spotlight on Ohio and Florida

Ohio Couple Facing Life In Prison in Child and Animal Sex Abuse Case

A Heath, Ohio couple are facing the possibility of life in prison after Licking County prosecutors filed dozens of charges against them alleging that they recorded sex acts with children and with a dog. The Newark *Advocate* reported that court records say that John Nethers, 43, and his wife, Brianna, 23, took secret videos of prepubescent girls in public bathrooms over a two-year period involving multiple victims, including a child as young as 3. Buckeye Valley YMCA officials said they believe at least two videos were recorded at the YMCA facility.

In reviewing electronic files on their devices, videos of Brianna Nethers were said to show her engaging in sexual conduct with minors and with a dog, court records say. Detectives also recovered text messages between the Netherses that indicate John Nethers was telling his wife how to adjust the camera angle on the camera and telling her to take the videos.

Man Gets Life Sentence for Killing Father and Dog and Strangling and Stabbing Wife

The Wood County, Ohio man who murdered his father, strangled his wife and killed a dog in September 2025 was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole. Richard Dannenberger, 37, of Troy Township, pleaded guilty to aggravated murder, murder, strangulation, felonious assault and cruelty to companion animals. WTOL-TV reported that police responding to his residence found 66-year-old Raymond Dannenberger and a dog dead. Dannenberger's wife survived a strangulation attack that night. He was subsequently indicted on additional charges for strangling and assaulting his wife with a knife and killing the dog.

Dannenberger may qualify for parole after 25-26 years, with 2-1/2 to 8 years of probation if he is released. He also received credit for over 400 days served in custody to date.

Ohio Woman Charged with Child and Animal Abuse

A Butler County, Ohio grand jury has handed up six indictments against a woman, charging her with animal cruelty and child endangerment. WKRC-TV reported that Tara Lynn Davis was charged with causing serious physical harm to two companion animals and failed to provide them with sufficient food and water. The child-endangerment charge alleges Davis created a substantial risk to the health or safety of a child by violating a duty of care, protection or support.

Dog Breeder's Co-defendant Charged with Animal Sex Abuse

The co-defendant in the case of the Ohio high-volume dog breeder who has been charged with animal cruelty, engaging in sexual conduct with an animal and other counts *(See the October 2026 LINK-Letter)* has also been charged. News 5 Cleveland reported that Ross Rutschilling, 24, of St. Henry, Ohio, is charged with attempted animal cruelty and five counts of aiding/abetting in an act involving sexual conduct with an animal. Rutschilling is reportedly currently out on bond in an unrelated case in Wells County, Ind., where he's charged with 21 felonies for solicitation of a minor and possession of child sex abuse material. The dog breeder, Daniel Miller, has a history of animal welfare and kennel violations dating back to 2018 and was charged with 10 counts of sexual conduct with an animal after 72 dogs were removed from his kennel.

School Complaint Leads to Child/Animal Welfare Check

After Middletown, Ohio school officials reported two 10-year-old children appeared dirty and had no food to eat, police conducted a welfare check of the home and reportedly found two dead cats, bedbugs and cockroaches, no edible food, floors covered in trash and feces, and holes in the wall one child said were caused when their parents got angry. WXIX-TV reported that Melanie and Christopher Todd were charged with four counts of child endangerment and several counts of animal cruelty. Police removed four children to the custody of family members and an assortment of cats, fish, mice, gerbils, and pet tarantulas.

THE LINK... in the NEWS -- Spotlight on Ohio and Florida

Three Sentenced in Botched Drug Burglary that Killed Man and Dog

One of the five defendants who disguised themselves as federal Drug Enforcement Administration agents and forced entry into a Merritt Island, Fla. residence to rob a suspected rival drug dealer, resulting in the deaths of both a human and a dog, was sentenced to 10 years in Florida state prison. Anthony Davila, 28, entered a plea agreement following charges stemming from the 2021 home invasion that resulted in the shooting deaths of Matthew Nicol and his German shepherd, "Mako".

According to the Brevard County State Attorney's Office, Davila was one of five individuals involved in the home invasion, Two of Davila's co-defendants previously were convicted of murder, armed burglary and animal cruelty and both were sentenced to prison in plea agreements. David Foreman-Taylor pled guilty in 2022 and received a 15-year prison sentence. Brian V. Vogel pled guilty in 2025 and got a 30-year sentence. Two remaining co-defendants, Chase Harrison and Cory Cabaniss, continue to face similar charges.

Deputies Remove 9 Children Living in Cages and 3 Dogs

Licking County, Ohio Sheriff's deputies arrested a couple on child endangerment charges after children's services alerted them to a bug-infested home with nine children in horrific living conditions, including some allegedly living in cages inside a small shed. Police also removed at least three dogs from the home of Jonathan Parr, 37, and Jacqueline Coleman, 32, of Etna Township.

News media said the arrest warrant outlined "appalling and unsafe living conditions" and alleged physical abuse, failure to provide food and water, insufficient living space, and juveniles being forced to stand for hours with nails between their toes and locked behind cages or barriers. The children, ranging in age from 1 to 13, were turned over to children's services. It was not clear whether a 64-year-old grandmother living in the home would also be charged.

Man Charged with Stabbing Girlfriend's Protective Dog

A man who allegedly stabbed his girlfriend's dog while it was trying to protect her during an argument has been charged with animal cruelty. WOIO-TV reported that Lamont Bell, 23, of Canton, Ohio, was taken into custody following a 911 call in which the woman said the dog, named "Pretty Girl," stepped between the couple as the argument escalated. Bell allegedly threatened to stab the dog if she bit him.

After the woman left the room, Pretty Girl hid under a crib but when Bell actively began looking for her the dog attacked and got stabbed in the face, police said. Bell fled in the girlfriend's car. Police said they recovered a box cutter and a cellphone video of him "actively going after the dog."

Bell was reportedly out on probation for an aggravated menacing charge less than a year ago that was dropped to criminal mischief. There were court orders for him to stay away from the victim and he was ordered to surrender a firearm as well.

Ex-Cop Charged with Child and Animal Pornography Amid Narcotics Investigation

A former part-time Pensacola, Fla. police officer who was already under arrest for possession of opioids was arrested again after a statewide investigation into online child pornography allegedly found child and animal sexual abuse materials on his devices.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement charged Matthew Baxter, 47, on four counts of possession of child sexual abuse material, 30 counts of sexual activity involving animals, four counts of digital voyeurism, and two counts of using a two-way communication device to facilitate a felony.

WEAR-TV reported that the FDLE said that during forensic analysis of devices seized in the narcotics investigation, agents found multiple files of child sexual abuse material, sexual activity involving animals, and images Baxter took of unknown subjects in various restrooms. The investigation remains active.

Pensacola Police Chief Eric Winstrom told news media that Baxter is accused of purchasing images of boys and girls online. The arrest is causing concern for parents of students at an elementary school where Baxter worked security for seven years.

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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