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Testimony in Support of Committee Bill 284 *An Act Concerning the Protection of Pets in Domestic Violence Cases.*

March 5, 2007

My name is Joanne Bourbeau. I am the Regional Director of the New England Regional Office of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). On behalf of the 148,816 Connecticut members and contributors to The HSUS, I submit this testimony in SUPPORT of Committee Bill 284, An Act Concerning the Protection of Pets in Domestic Violence Cases.

While this bill on its surface may seem like a measure to protect pets, it is really a measure to protect pet owners as well. The well-documented link between animal cruelty and human violence has shown us that violence crosses all boundaries. Abusers target animals for the same reason they target people, to exercise power & control, to perpetuate the context of terror, to further isolate their victims, and to prevent their victims from leaving or to punish them for leaving.

National studies and first-hand accounts by the victims of abuse clearly show that violence to pets is often a tactic used by batterers to instill fear in and control over their victims. A 1997 survey of 50 of the largest shelters for battered women in the United States found that 85 percent of women and 63 percent of children entering shelters discussed incidents of pet abuse in the family. Some studies found that up to 48% of women delay their escape to safety in order to protect their companion animals. This is an unacceptable and preventable statistic.

Just recently I had a conversation with an administrator at a VA hospital in Vermont, who was trying to find assistance for a woman she termed "suicidal." She had successfully left her abuser a few months ago, only to move back to the state—and back in with him—because she was concerned for the safety of her Shetland Sheepdog. She was looking for help to flee her abuser yet again . . . this time with her beloved companion at her side.

The strength of the human/animal bond does not disappear in times of conflict. In fact, it strengthens. For many women, especially those who are subjected to routine punishment and terror, their pet may be their only lifeline. The unconditional love and trust our pets give to us can't be measured, nor can it be discounted. Abusers routinely use this bond—and the threat of harm and/or death to a pet—to prevent their victim from leaving. For these women, they would no sooner leave their pet behind than they would their own child.

Similar laws in Maine, Vermont and New York have already been passed. Currently, legislatures in eleven states—Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington—and the District of Columbia—are considering “pet protection” legislation.

If this legislation is successful and allows even one woman to leave a dangerous situation before it's too late, it will have served its purpose. I urge your favorable support.



Joanne Bourbeau
New England Regional Director
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