

To include pets in protective orders in domestic violence cases

Good afternoon. My name is Juliet Meyer, and I live in Hartford. I am addressing you today to urge you to support this bill.

Abusers harm pets, or threaten to harm them, in order to terrify and control their human victims. The terror is two-fold. On the one hand, the sight or thought of their pets being hurt is terrifying and painful; no one wants to watch or contemplate his or her beloved pet suffering. On the other hand, some human victims extrapolate from the harm to their pets and wonder if they are to expect the same terrible treatment themselves. Harming pets, or threatening to harm them, also serves the important function of assisting the abuser in controlling his or her human victim. If a pet is harmed or threatened with harm, the human victim may feel unable to try to leave, hide the pet, or summon help because he or she is afraid that the pet will be killed or subjected to further abuse and cruelty. My own first husband was very jealous of my tiny canary and saw Abel as a threat and a rival. He began to hate him, even saying that this little ball of yellow feathers was "arrogant" for scattering his seeds when he ate. He went so far as to demand that I choose between them, threatening always. Luckily, I was able to protect my bird, but the threats were paralyzing, because I always feared for my pet's safety, knowing that he would be used as a weapon against me and a way to control me.

But my primary concern is the safety of the animals. As I have said, pets make perfect pawns in situations of domestic violence. They are vulnerable to the most horrible cruelty from their abusers, and their human caretakers may well not be able to protect them. Protective orders from the courts offer their only refuge. In the words of the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham, "The question is not, can they reason? Nor can they talk? But, *can they suffer?*" Please help these most helpless of the victims of domestic violence.

And lastly, a recent issue of Bird Talk Magazine erroneously named Connecticut as one of the few states where pets are already protected under domestic violence statutes. Let's not prove them wrong. Thank you.