



THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

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**Testimony of Debora M. Bresch, Esq.
American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

**Concerning Senate Bill 649
(An Act Concerning School Learning Environment)**

**Education Committee
March 10, 2008**

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, members of the Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to comment on **Senate Bill 649 (An Act Concerning School Learning Environment)**, which seeks to improve school climate. I am Debora Bresch, an attorney and lobbyist with the Legislative Services Department of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or ASPCA, which counts 17,000 Connecticut residents among its supporters. **On our supporters' behalf, I respectfully urge the Education Committee to amend SB 649 to require that in-service training regarding humane education be offered to Connecticut's teachers.**

As you know, the large and increasingly organized animal community in Connecticut has been urging the legislature for the last several years to incorporate humane education into the in-service training curriculum offered to teachers, who are required to complete at least 90 hours of continuing education (9.0 CEUs) every five years. (In the 2007 legislative session, the Senate passed a humane education bill, SB 1146, 32-3.) Only some of these CEUs must be satisfied with courses in the teaching of reading and/or using computers in the classroom, and it is my understanding that teachers are pleased to have a variety of well-conceived in-service training courses on which to draw. I know the dearth of useful in-service training courses was a perennial complaint lodged by my mother, a long-time first-grade teacher who taught just over the Connecticut border. With respect to the need for in-service training regarding humane education, in particular, I am mindful of the imploring testimony of West Haven alternative education teacher Regina Milano before the Environment Committee:

"The impending concerns which have brought me here today, those which I believe stand to be remedied through humane education, are the incidences in which students have expressed a blatant lack of respect for life. For example, in a discussion initiated by a student about the CSI investigation of 'canned hunts,' in which animals...with no hope for escape are shot at, another student, age 17, responded, 'Who cares, they're just animals?'

"Another incident which troubled me, but which is not uncharacteristic of the experiences to which my students are exposed and/or take part in, was the story shared by a female student, age eighteen. She revealed that one year ago, she and her aunt brought their cat to an overpass and dropped it on to a highway because it had scratched the aunt. In this account, she described in detail the image of the cat 'exploding' all over the highway. When queried about her actions, she responded without emotion, 'I don't like cats.'"

After the Environment Committee hearing, Ms. Milano gave me the disturbing news that this girl became pregnant not long after telling the story about the cat, raising unnerving questions about her baby's future. Given the link between animal cruelty and violence toward people, it seems unlikely that this teenage mother won't abuse her baby, or that the baby won't grow up to abuse children and hurt people.

More recently, a Plainville man drilled holes in the skull of a one-year old pit bull in what police described as an "act of rage." This act of cruelty was retaliation against the reportedly malnourished dog for biting the man's son, who was handling her allegedly emaciated puppy. The child was treated and released by the hospital the same day. The dog had to be euthanized due to the seriousness of her injuries. One wonders what lessons the man's son has learned from the father's ongoing mistreatment of these two dogs, culminating in this terrible event.

The Education Committee's interest in the capacity of character education to improve student behavior is certainly understandable. **However, I respectfully suggest that, in the foregoing context, students must also receive instruction concerning the importance of showing compassion, respect, and empathy toward both animals and people (as well as the value of preserving a healthy and sustainable environment given the grave global environmental crisis we face and can only resolve collectively).**

The connection between animal cruelty and anti-social behavior is clear. According to a study by noted researchers Arnold Arluke, Jack Levin, Carter Luke, and Frank Ascione ("The Relationship of Animal Abuse to Violence and Other Forms of Antisocial Behavior," 1999):

"People who commit a single known act of animal abuse – oftentimes far less torturous and sadistic than the individuals examined in classic studies in the literature...are more likely to commit other criminal offenses than matched participants who do not abuse animals. As a flag of

potential antisocial behavior – including but not limited to violence – isolated acts of cruelty toward animals must not be ignored by judges, psychiatrists, social workers, veterinarians, police, and others who encounter cases of abuse in their work.”

The research is also clear, however, that humane education can counteract such inappropriate thoughts and behavior:

- Students who were instructed in humane education subsequently scored higher on humane attitude scales than those who did not. (*Ascione, F.R., “Enhancing Children’s Attitudes About the Humane Treatment of Animals and Empathy: Generalization to Human-Directed Empathy,” Anthrozoos, 5(3), 176-91 (1992) and Ascione, F.R. and Weber, C.V., “Children’s Attitudes About the Humane Treatment of Animals and Empathy: One-Year Follow-up of a School-Based Intervention,” Anthrozoos, 9(4), 188-95 (1996).*)
- Children who are more knowledgeable about and favorably inclined toward animals are more likely to respond with greater empathy to people and have better relationship with peers. (*Montminy-Danna, M. & O’Hare, T. (2001), Evaluation Report: Effectiveness of the Potter League Humane Education Program, Potter League for Animals, Middletown, R.I.*)

Further, students receiving environmental action instruction reported engaging in more environmentally responsible actions following a workshop in environmental education than they did prior to the workshop. (*Jordan, J.R., Hungerford, H.R., & Tomera, A.N., “Effects of Two Residential Workshops on High School Students,” Journal of Environmental Education, 18(1), 15-21 (1986).*)

The bottomline is that humane education fosters kindness, critical thinking, and a sense of responsibility in children. As children learn to treat each other humanely, they become less likely to cause disciplinary problems or engage in childhood or adult violence and more likely to take care of others and the environment. Also, classroom discussions emphasizing empathy and respect can help teachers identify at-risk children requiring early intervention.

It can only help that children are especially interested in animals and animal-related subjects, making animals superior vehicles for learning, and that animals are also uniquely capable of providing children of diverse socio-economic backgrounds and cultural heritages with a common point of reference.

In addition, humane education is cost-effective. Humane education is easily integrated into existing school curricula, without taking away significant time or resources from other subjects (in fact, fewer disciplinary incidents means more time for instruction). Further, many low-cost or free humane education resources already exist.

Thirteen states currently have humane education laws. On behalf of the ASPCA's thousands of Connecticut supporters, I respectfully urge the Education Committee to make the connection between compassion toward animals and empathy toward other people and enact such a law as well. **I urge the amendment of SB 649 to offer in-service training regarding humane education to Connecticut's teachers.**

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

New Haven Public Schools

Reginald Mayo, Ph.D
Superintendent

March 10, 2008

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON
S.B. 644, AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF THE OPEN CHOICE
PROGRAM, S.B. 645, AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF ISSUES
CONCERNING THE INTERDISTRICT MAGNET SCHOOL
PROGRAM, and H.B. 5871, AAC THE BEST PROGRAM**

Senator Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann, Members of the Education Committee, following is my testimony on several bills before you.

Senate Bill No. 644, An Act Concerning a Study of the Open Choice Program, requires the State Department of Education to study issues concerning the open choice program under section 10-266aa and report back to this committee by January 3, 2009.

New Haven is one of the sending districts listed in the statute. We receive far more students through our interdistrict magnet program than we send out through open choice, and we also receive some open choice students.

We like the program and would request that a more formal task force be established, so that school districts and legislators can be represented in a study. We believe that the open choice program merits open input.

Senate Bill No. 645, An Act Concerning a Study of Issues Concerning the Interdistrict Magnet School Program, requires the State Department of Education to study issues concerning the interdistrict magnet school program under section 10-264l and report back to this committee by January 3, 2009.

Twenty-seven school districts participate in the New Haven interdistrict magnet program, ranging from pre-K through grade 12, with over 1,700 students attending from other districts. We believe our program is the largest and most successful in the state, and our schools generate excitement for their themes from throughout the region. We have concerns about potential changes in funding that will impact sending and receiving districts.

Therefore, if there is to be a study – beyond that conducted by the Education Committee in 2006 – then again we would request that a more formal task force be established, so that our school district and others as well as legislators can be represented in a study.



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