

TESTIMONY OF CLAUDIA A. WEBER TO THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, MARCH 9, 2009.

Senator MacDonald, Representative Lawlor, members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am speaking in favor of **SB650 An Act Concerning Trusts for Domestic Animals** and can speak to this issue from several unique and personal perspectives.

First, I have a background in government and appreciate the duties and responsibilities imposed upon our public officials. I am currently, and have been for the past 12 years, the Town Clerk for the Town of New Canaan and have previously worked at various levels of Federal, State and local government.

Second, in 1983, when two elderly people perished in a fire along with 20 of their 40 cats, there were no agencies or rescue groups to help. As a result, I shortly thereafter, founded Strays & Others, Inc., a volunteer-run 501(c)(3) charity which has been committed to the rescue and responsible placement of homeless and abandoned animals for the past 24 years. I still serve as its Executive Director and President and was recently honored by the American Red Cross of Lower Fairfield County for my work in this field. During the past two and a half decades, we have rescued and placed nearly 4300 animals and have assisted thousands of people and pets who required our help. We reach out to, and represent, thousands of people who care about animals through out Fairfield County.

Countless times Strays & Others has been called upon by a relative of a decedent who will ask us to take an animal left behind through the death of an owner. Numerous other times, we have also been contacted because the pet's owner, or guardian, had to go into a nursing home and there were no provisions made for the animal left behind. This has placed an unfair burden on many nonprofit rescue organizations because no funding had ever been set aside for these once beloved pets and relatives aren't legally obligated to carry out their wishes.

We have also witnessed cases where provisions have been made in a Will, but the person who was given the task of caring for the animal did not hold up their end of the bargain, and the decedents' pets were either abandoned or tossed away with little regard of what happened to them. This is a frightening thought for many of us.

Third, I also live with my own companion animals, and I care very much what happens to them if I were to die or become incapacitated. Without the legal ability to create a trust for the benefit of my pets, I have no way of guaranteeing that they will be able to continue to live in a manner consistent with my belief systems or that they will even remain alive at all.

The Katrina hurricane taught us much more than just about levees and government bureaucracy. It made us all, as a nation, become aware and willing to accept that companion animals are no longer considered to be property; they are considered to be family members, and people will go to great lengths to protect them.

As elected officials, we are called upon to represent our constituents and do what's best for the public good. **I urge you to support SB650.** I applaud State Senator Toni Boucher and State Representative John Hetherington for their efforts and support and the members of this committee for their consideration of such important legislation. And I assure you that the majority of the electors and residents of Connecticut want this Bill to be passed without delay.

Thank you.



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