

Testimony of Gloria J. Lagosz,
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Regarding:
CT HB 5798—Dog Tethering and Confinement

Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, members of the Environment Committee, thank you for this opportunity to comment on bill CT HB 5798—Dog Tethering and Confinement

Ask anyone in the neighborhood about the brick cape on the corner of Burritt and Alden Street in New Britain, and they will immediately know that you are talking about 510 Burritt Street. Rather shabby, the house sits among well cared for two and three family homes. There is a green chain link fence around the front of the property and the blue shutters with the missing slats, hang askew. A large brick building makes up the majority of the backyard of the house. In itself, this house is quite ordinary. What makes it stand out, are the two dog houses sitting in the front yard. One of the houses is set against the cape, and has a very small opening. The dog has to crawl in its belly to enter the dog house. The other house is more like a box, with an opening that is almost half the width of the front of the box. It offers little or no protection from the wind and snow. Both dog houses have minimal amount of hay. There is one large bush located in between the dog houses, making it the only shade from the sun and heat in the summer and offering absolutely no comfort in the winter. Water is not freely available in the winter, as it would freeze. When it snows, a shovel's width path is made from one dog house to the other. In the summer there is a bucket for water, but is it hard to tell if there is water in it. And the occupants of the dog houses, to afford some small escape from the summer heat, have dug a shallow hole in the earth behind the bush. There is never any activity in the front yard, and the front door never opens, for this house is not a home, but business during the day. At night it is quiet and lonely. There are no toys to stimulate, no loving voice calls out "I'm home" no one comes to take them in and the tethers that hold the dogs to their houses allow for very limited ability to roam the front yard.

I first observed the lucky dogs of these dog houses over two years ago when I started my new job. One of the dogs appears to be a small black lab mix and the other dog is a little larger shepherd mix. In the two years I have been observing these dogs, I have never seen them anywhere else except tied to their dog houses. I thought that surely no one would be cruel enough to keep dogs tied to their houses in temperatures above 90 degrees or below freezing. I was wrong. In extremely hot weather, the dogs do not have the energy to move from their hole behind the bush. In cold weather, they spend the entire day and night in the dog houses, for weeks and weeks on end. As the extent to this cruelty became obvious to me, I knew that I had to at least try to do something. I stopped one day and tried to speak to the owner. I asked him who the dogs belonged to and he told me his son. When I asked him if he ever considered the quality of life he was providing these animals, he told me to mind my own business and that what he was doing was within the guidelines set down by law. The sad thing was, he really was within the law. I called the police department to report what I had observed. The officer who answered my call told me that the police department is familiar with that address, and there have been many complaints. I asked that the animal control officer be informed and was told he would be. However, I was also told that as long as the dogs had food and shelter, there was little that could be done. Quite by accident I had the opportunity to talk to a former employee of the owner, and was told that other neighbors had also complained and nothing had changed. One day, as I went to work, I saw that the shepherd mix had tangled its tether around the bush so tightly, that it literally had tied its face to the trunk of the bush.

The dog could not move at all and I was very worried it would choke. When I got to work, I immediately called the police. When they heard that address, they got very short with me and reiterated that the dogs have shelter and food and that is all they needed to stay within the law. I said I understood, but was calling for another reason. I don't know if the animal control officer ever went to the house, but later that day the dog was untangled.

I am not an animal activist, nor a bleeding heart. I am merely a person who believes in the humane treatment of all animals. As I passed by that house each day and saw how those dogs lived each and everyday of their lives, they quickly and unintentionally became a part of my life. When the temperature was going to be below freezing or if we were expecting a bad snowstorm, I worried about how they could possibly stay warm or comfortable in sub zero temperatures. Every time the weatherman said that it would be a dangerous night to keep animals outside, I dreaded going by the dogs in the morning and yet I could not stop worrying until I was sure they had not frozen to death overnight. I was relieved that the lab mix was alive, but often times sadden to see that the dog was stiff from the cold and long periods in cramped quarters. After an extremely hot night, I was relieved to see that the Shepherd mix was alive, but saddened to observe that the dog was lethargic and did not move or lift its head. I was concerned when I realized that neither dog ever barked much. I worried that dogs were being eaten by fleas and becoming anemic from ticks feeding on them all summer. I worried that both dogs might be suffering from heartworm. And there were times, especially when it was bitterly cold, that I was amazed these creatures were still alive. I never stopped thinking that these dogs, as well as the many animals that live in even poorer conditions deserve so much better.

Conditions for these dogs and the thousands of animals that manage to continue to existing, but not living humanely is controlled by and could be changed by specifically defining one simple word in our existing laws – **reasonable**. The law dictates that an animal must have food, water, and some sort of shelter. It also dictates that an animal can only remain tied or kept outside for a reasonable amount of time. By not giving reasonable a time frame, it is left up to the discretion of the owners to decide what is reasonable. If an owner decides to treat an animal in their care inhumanely, animal control hesitates to intercede, except in the worst possible scenarios because the word reasonable is based on the interpretation. Define reasonable with a number and animals that live each day of their lives cold, hot, hungry, sick, isolated, depressed, frightened, abandoned or hopeless, will be given a chance for a humane, if not happy existence. Define reasonable and owners who treat their animals with cruel indifference, can be hold accountable by law. It is such a small change, but it can and will make such a big difference.

When those of you who are pet owners go home tonight and look into the eyes of your beloved pet, I hope you come to realize that animals can only have a life free of suffering in two ways – through the care of a loving owner or a change in the laws to provide all animals with the protection they deserve and to insure that owners who treat their animals cruelly will be held accountable. If you want to pay tribute to the loyal companions who have loved you unconditionally these many years, give them the greatest gift of all – a way to help all animals live humanely.