

Testimony to the Committee on Children
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Vice President

Senator Musto, Representative Urban, members of the Select Committee on Children, I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Municipal Animal Control Officers Association.

As currently proposed, we oppose **Raised Bill No. 5041 {Cross-reporting of Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty}**

Although, in theory, this proposed bill would be very beneficial for the welfare of children and animals, it comes with many questions and concerns from an Animal Control Officer's point of view.

Being that the majority of Animal Control Officers work for a local Police Department directly or work closely with them, I would be surprised if any such officer would neglect reporting any suspected child abuse case. Regardless, if such reporting is to become mandatory, then there must be consideration for proper training and protocol.

The Department of Children and Families have well established guidelines and training for the reporting of suspected child abuse, but yet there is little proposed for the reporting of animal cruelty. Just as ACO's would need proper training, DCF workers would also need to be trained on the identification of suspected animal cruelty and abuse.

It is proposed that reporting of Animal Cruelty be done so, orally, to the Department of Agriculture no later than twelve hours and in writing, no later than 48 hours. DCF has an established 24 hour hot line. The Dept. of Agriculture is not open in the evenings or weekend hours. Without reporting such suspected animal abuse directly to local or state law enforcement agencies, so they in turn can notify the local ACO, animals, in need, may not get any type of help for days. In many circumstances, this may be too late.

If it is to be made mandatory for DCF workers to report animal abuse, what type of penalties would be instated for not reporting an incident? Although it may sound absurd, veterinarians are not even required to report cases of animal abuse.

The majority (if not all) of those already established as mandated reporters, are licensed or certified in their professions, yet Animal Control Officers have struggled for years to establish some sort of mandatory certification and education program through the state of CT. Yes, although we are law enforcement officers, there is no mandatory training or requirements to become an Animal Control Officer in the State of Connecticut.

Few people realize that by definition, Animal Control Officers are in a very dangerous grey area. ACO's are to carry out their duties "in the same manner as a Police Officer" (CGS 22-330), however, they are not considered Peace Officers, Public Safety, or Police Officers. According to current CT law 53a-167c, it is a Class C felony to assault or cause physical harm to a Police Officer, Special Police Officer, or a Peace Officer. This law goes on to include members of the Dept. of Corrections, Parole, Probation, Judicial, Motor Vehicles, Firefighters, EMT's, physicians and nurse staff, Dept. of Children and Families, volunteer canine search and rescue members, and most recently added, Public Transit employees. Where do Animal Control Officers fall?

If this proposed child/ animal abuse bill is to include the efforts on both parts of DCF and Animal Control, Animal Control Officers should, logically, at the very least, have the same protection against harm as a DCF worker. If ACO's are to have their responsibilities extended in an already dangerous occupation, shouldn't the State of Connecticut extend the laws that regard the assault of other employees to include Animal Control Officers as well?

Whether it is a State of CT oversight or the ignorance of public perception, Animal Control Officers have long suffered the ramifications of being in a law enforcement "limbo". ACO's put their lives on the line everyday, and deal with the same "bad" people and circumstances as other law enforcement officers yet they are not treated equally by any means. (Just this past fall, we tragically lost a dedicated animal control officer, who was also the president of our state animal control association, while she was conducting her duties).

If Animal Control Officers are to be given the added responsibility of mandated reporters of child abuse, then I can only hope that the State of Connecticut will update their laws to properly certify and define the occupation of an Animal Control Officer (to at least a Peace Officer) and to include Animal Control in the laws that protect various other state emergency personnel.

The Connecticut Municipal Animal Control Officers Association would like to offer their assistance, in anyway, to help transform this proposal to a productive bill that will best serve the welfare of both children and animals.