

Testimony of Annie Chittenden  
CT SafePet Project, Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary  
In Support of Raised Bill 6226 – an Act Concerning Cross Reporting of Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty  
Select Committee on Children  
February 3, 2011

Representative Urban, Representative Fawcett and members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.

I am the program manager of the CT Safe Pet Project, which is a program of Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary. We provide vetting and foster services for the pets of victims of domestic violence, and helpline and referral services for pet owners in crisis.

We strongly support Raised Bill 6226. This bill requires that animal control officers who have reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child is being abused or neglected, or is in danger of being abused or neglected, to immediately report this activity to the Department of Children and Families.

Animal abuse is often discovered earlier than domestic abuse because it so often occurs in plain view. Since laws governing animal abuse and child abuse investigation and intervention differ, animal control agents can often enter homes when social service workers cannot. Working together through cross-reporting, these agencies can help one another gain information about possible neglect and abuse.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police has reported: "Social scientists and law enforcement agencies have begun to examine cruelty to animals as a serious human problem closely linked to domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse and other violent crimes. [These efforts] cannot undo generations of abuse, but they can be an effective means of breaking the cycle of family violence from one generation to the next."

The reporting of animal abuse and neglect can provide a crucial red flag indicating that conditions in the home pose significant risk to children and others.

Because 70 to 80% of households with children also have pets, I provided training last year to DCF caseworkers regarding the critical link between animal welfare and child safety. A DCF caseworker subsequently called us in on a case involving an at-risk child whom DCF had removed from the home. Thanks to her training, the caseworker was not only able to recognize that a child was at risk, but that family's pets were sick and malnourished and one pet was close to death. We accepted the pets into our program and worked with DCF and the pet owner over the course of several weeks so that the family was ultimately able to be reunited, and the adult involved was better educated about both her child's and her pets' needs.

Proper training on the benefits of cross-reporting can result in early detection of abuse and neglect, and can ultimately protect children and animals from escalating cycles of abuse.

Please support Raised Bill 6226. This bill will go a long way toward protecting victims of abuse and neglect who have no voice and are ultimately the most vulnerable members of our communities- our children and domestic animals.

Thank you.