



City of Middletown
Animal Control Department

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Testimony Concerning Raised Bill 5446
Gail Petras – Animal Control Officer
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I would like to thank the Environment Committee for the opportunity to express my support of Raised Bill 5446 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE PAYMENT PROCEDURE FOR THE STERILIZATION AND VACCINATION OF CERTAIN DOGS AND CATS AND PROVIDING FOR ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER TRAINING.

I have been an Animal Control Officer in Connecticut for nearly ten years. Since I was first introduced to this profession, I have been bewildered by the lack of required training standards in this field. This has prompted me to become active in several organizations that support and offer annual training opportunities for ACOs.

There have been far too many cases on the news in the last year blaming ACOs for not doing their job properly. In many of these cases, ACOs have been fired or investigated for criminal acts. While I will not defend their acts, I will say that it is unfair to accuse them of not doing their jobs properly when they may not have had ANY training on how to do the job in the first place.

When Police Officers are hired, they must attend the Police Academy for almost five months of training and then attend mandatory recertification classes periodically. Imagine that you are hired as a Police Officer and immediately put on the job with one full year to complete initial training. Seems outrageous, right? Most ACOs have powers of arrest regarding animal laws and deal with the same criminals as the Police. The Police, along with the public, look to us for our expertise in animal related laws and care because we are Animal Control Officers. In order to properly investigate animal cases, we must be trained in the basics of securing a crime scene, photographing it and collecting evidence. Cases can and will get dismissed if we do not process search, seizure and arrest warrants properly or inadvertently violate the rights of the accused due to lack of proper training.

I work with numerous professional, educated, Animal Control Officers throughout the state. We work extremely hard to excel in our field and to get as much training as we can. We are putting our lives on the line every day to protect the general public and the animals that they keep. We work tirelessly to prosecute offenders of horrible cruelty and we do not want our hard work to be wasted because we make a mistake due to lack of training. Most of us work to acquire training wherever and whenever possible because we care. We are often told that our departments cannot afford it. Million-dollar lawsuits on the news should show our departments that they cannot afford NOT to train us.

I am fortunate to be part of a department that values training. They understand that proper training is critical to proper investigating and prosecution. They realize that \$525 for 40 hours of top-notch training is a small price to pay when my safety and my department's reputation is on the line. Unfortunately, not all departments feel this way, so we need to mandate training to ensure that we are ALL prepared to do our jobs to the best of our ability.

While I am passionately supportive of this bill, I do not think that the funding should come from the Animal Population Control account. Those funds should be used as intended: for spaying and neutering our adoptable animals. Local municipalities need to be responsible for training their officers. A one-time training cost of less than \$1100 per officer is not an exorbitant expense. By investing in their ACOs, they will gain educated, loyal employees who feel valued and professional.

We have already lost an excellent Animal Control Officer in CT in the line of duty, Theresa Foss. Her name is on the wall of heroes at the National Animal Control Association Memorial Wall and Garden along with 19 other ACOs. Many, many more have been lost or injured in the line of duty. I wonder how many lives might have been saved with proper training.

We are no longer “dog catchers”; we are Animal Control Officers. We are proud to do our jobs and the time has come to officially “raise the bar”. Please help us to pass this bill and give our profession the respect and recognition that it deserves.

Sincere thanks,

Gail Petras
Animal Control Officer – Middletown, CT