



**HB 6187 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF ANIMALS THAT ARE THE SUBJECT OF CRIMINAL COURT PROCEEDINGS**

**SB 1128 AN ACT PROHIBITING THE USE OF ACCELERATED REHABILITATION IN THE CASE OF ANIMAL ABUSE**

**Judiciary Committee, April 1, 2015**

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Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, other leaders and members of the Judiciary Committee, I would like to express my support of HB 6187 and SB 1128. Both bills would make great strides toward building a better justice system for both animals and humans: one that identifies and documents violent individuals, and treats animal cruelty with the seriousness it deserves, and ultimately helps to stop the cycle of violence.

The link between animal cruelty and domestic violence has been well studied and documented. Wherever there is animal abuse, there is a good chance there is also child and spousal abuse, and vice versa. In 2011, the Connecticut Legislature recognized the importance of this link when it enacted a law to require cross-reporting of child abuse and animal cruelty (Public Act 11-194). Now, the Dept of Children and Families and the Dept of Agriculture share their case reports of abuse and neglect, and as a result they are very likely saving lives.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation recognizes the significance of crimes against animals, and has adjusted their operations and accordingly. In fall of 2014, the FBI announced plans to begin tracking animal cruelty offenders, which required them to create a new category of crime. Instead of being lumped into a catch-all "other" category, animal cruelty is now subdivided into four levels, and is rightly considered on par with other major crimes. (See: <http://news.yahoo.com/fbi-classifies-animal-abuse-crime-against-society-162448234.html> )

With these two bills, the Legislature has two more opportunities to stem violent behavior. HB 6187 would utilize expert volunteers to assist courts in animal abuse cases. A court advocate can

spend the extra time to ensure the court is fully informed of the details and circumstances of a case, which can lead to more successful prosecutions, and keep more criminals off the streets.

SB 1128 would remove Accelerated Rehabilitation as a penalty option for cases prosecuted under the animal cruelty statutes. If AR is intended to be used only for crimes of a less serious nature, I fully believe it is not an appropriate punishment for animal cruelty. Worse still, AR means the crime is erased from the individual's record, making tracking of the crime impossible.

Connecticut Votes for Animals represents thousands of members in Connecticut, and consistently, the top concern I hear from them is that we must do more to address animal cruelty. I strongly urge you to please support the passage of both of these bills, and help ensure that our justice system treats animal cruelty cases with the seriousness they deserve.

Thank you,  
Amy Harrell