

**Testimony Concerning HB 6187 and SB 1128 - Jennifer Wynn, West Hartford, CT
Judiciary Committee, April 1, 2015**

Dear Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support of HB 6187 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF ANIMALS THAT ARE THE SUBJECT OF CRIMINAL COURT PROCEEDINGS and SB 1128 AN ACT PROHIBITING THE USE OF ACCELERATED REHABILITATION IN THE CASE OF ANIMAL ABUSE.

As a constituent concerned about the welfare of animals and people, I strongly support these bills.

Often, animal cruelty cases accompany convictions and punishments that are too lenient. Regardless of how any individual feels generally about animal welfare, everyone should be concerned about the punishment and legal repercussions of citizens who torture, abuse, or otherwise harm animals. The reason for this is simple: those who harm animals, are very often prone and likely to harm humans. 70% of school shooters, for example, abused animals before taking violent action against people.

I personally am disturbed to see news reports of people who harm voiceless, defenseless animals, and feel very strongly that the severity of crime should correlate with the proper level of penalties. I understand that animal cruelty cases rarely result in felony convictions (around 1.3% of reports). Most cases result in the abuser receiving a slap on the wrist or “accelerated rehab”, an inadequate response to crimes as serious as often land in court. The figures are shocking to me, when so much data supports that we should be taking the opposite position on abuse cases. 1128 would seek to correct this, and prevent application of an accelerated program for animal cruelty offenders.

I also believe that HB 6187 is appropriate, given the nature of victims in these cases. There is no way for an animal to tell a judge what happened to them. I see this as similar to the success and necessity of the CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) program that advocates for children in court. Advocacy is needed to ensure that our legal decision makers hear the stories of those who cannot advocate for themselves.

You may also know that in September 2014, the FBI amended its reporting program to include crimes against animals. This was reported in the popular press and I have heard many people celebrate this direction. The connection between those who would harm animals and eventually humans, is well-documented and understood by the general public. I feel that most law-abiding citizens favor strict penalties for violent offenders, even if the victims of those crimes are not human. If we can identify, document and penalize offenders early on, we can prevent those who harm non-humans, from ever reaching the point that they act against humans.

Please joint favorably report on HB 6187 and SB 1128. This is the right direction, in my opinion, to improve the safety of Connecticut citizens, along with the safety of voiceless animals who also occupy this great state.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify and I do hope you will strongly support this important piece of legislation.

Thank you,
Jennifer Wynn