NATIONAL LINK COALITION

Working together to stop violence against people and animals

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February 19, 2016

Re: **HB 5344** – "CASA for Animals"

To the members of the Connecticut Joint Committee on the Judiciary:

The National Link Coalition – which serves as the National Resource Center on The Link Between Animal Abuse and Human Violence – has been following the introduction of measures which would enable courts to appoint victim advocates to represent the best interests of animals and of justice in animal cruelty cases.

Our coalition – and the 58 of our 2,860 members who live in Connecticut – is **in support of HB 5344.**

Although animals are, and will continue to remain, property in the eyes of the law, there is ample legal precedent for the appointment of special agents to represent animals' interests. HB 5344 is similar in many respects to the long-established procedures of Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for children in child abuse cases, divorce proceedings and custody disputes. Children were once considered property as well and their interests were represented for the first 90 years of the child protection movement by humane societies. The Connecticut Humane Society, for example, had dual responsibilities in preventing both child abuse as well as animal abuse for the first 84 years of its existence (1881 – 1965).

Several states have enacted, or are considering, legislation along similar lines:

Rhode Island enacted similar legislation several years ago.

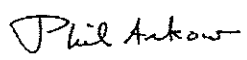
- Bills pending in **New York** and **Massachusetts** would authorize a guardian *ad litem* to be appointed by courts in tort causes of action for wrongful injury or death of a companion animal.

- A bill in the **Alaska** legislature would allow courts handling divorce cases and issuing domestic violence protection-from-abuse orders to consider the animals' best interests in awarding custody of the animals.

We believe the changes in the 2016 measure – which would appoint qualified, screened *pro bono* attorneys and law students rather than veterinarians – to be an improvement over the 2013 version of this bill. We offer our full support and are ready to assist you with any questions or concerns you might have.

With thanks for your consideration of this letter and of HB 5344 I am

Very truly yours,



Phil Arkow
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