



**Testimony in support for HB 5344 AN ACT CONCERNING SUPPORT FOR ANIMALS THAT ARE NEGLECTED OR TREATED CRUELLY.**

**Judiciary Committee, February 24, 2016**

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Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, other leaders and members of the Judiciary Committee, I would like to express support on behalf of Connecticut Votes for Animals, for HB 5344, An Act Concerning Support for Animals that are Neglected or Treated Cruelly.

In my view, one of the main goals of this bill is to provide a voice in the courtroom that until now has not been heard. A volunteer advocate will be uniquely focused on the animal that is the victim of cruelty and therefore bring a new dimension to court proceedings. The involvement of an advocate will remind the court of the gravity of the crime, and the potential for further violence if the accused individual is in fact guilty.

The link between animal cruelty and domestic violence has been well documented, and repeatedly cited at length in support of this bill. Wherever there is animal abuse, there is a good chance there is also child or spousal abuse, and vice versa. We are obliged to take animal cruelty very seriously if we want to interrupt the cycle of violence.

Every act of animal cruelty is an act of violence. And every cruelty case that is not prosecuted, to me, represents a lost opportunity to improve public safety. When courts underestimate the significance of an animal cruelty offense, they risk releasing a violent criminal back into the community.

This bill would provide no-cost assistance to the courts in their endeavor to address animal cruelty offenses. It would put into place a mechanism for pro bono attorneys and law students to serve as an independent advocate, at the pleasure of the court, whether in the form of research help, or as a witness. An advocate's assistance with research and synthesis could even save taxpayer funds by helping the courts to wrap up cases more quickly.

Connecticut Votes for Animals represents thousands of members in Connecticut, who are concerned about their family, their pets, and their community. Consistently, the top concern I hear from them is that we must do more to address animal cruelty. There are many ways we can do this, of course, but this bill provides a uniquely innovative, flexible, no-cost program that will substantially boost our ability to address and prevent violence. I strongly urge you to please support the passage of HB 5344.

Thank you,  
Amy Harrell