

Testimony Concerning Bill HB 5344  
Judiciary Committee, February 24, 2016  
Marlene Wilhelm

House Rabbit Connection, Inc  
Volunteer  
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Our Companions Animal Rescue  
Volunteer  
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I would like to thank the Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to give my testimony in regards to HB 5344 – An Act Concerning Support for Animals that are Neglected or Created Cruelly.

**DESMOND'S LAW:**

Animal cruelty is an act of violence and rarely occurs in isolation. Too often, our state's courts seem to overlook this fact. Abusers get away with a hand slap, or worse yet, are not even prosecuted at all. Desmond was severely abused and tortured to death, but his abuser got away with "Accelerated Rehabilitation." 80% of the animal cruelty charges brought against individuals in Connecticut are dismissed. For these cases, there is no justice for the abused animal, and potentially violent criminals are permitted to walk free. Accumulating evidence demonstrates a strong link between violence to animals and violence to people. In recognition of that link in 2011 CT enacted a law requiring Cross Reporting of Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty. And this January, for the first time ever, the FBI began collecting data on animal abuse cases.

However CT's animal cruelty laws and reporting requirements will mean nothing unless serious violations are prosecuted. A November 2015 report by Connecticut's Office of Legislative Research shows that between 2005 and 2015, only 3500 cases were brought under the animal cruelty statute and of those cases a full 80% never made it to Court (47% not prosecuted (nolled) and 33% were dismissed).

To help remedy this injustice, we need to advocate for and enact Animal Advocate in Court, aka, Desmond's Law: Introduced by Representative Diana Urban and supported by a broad coalition of pro-animal advocacy groups, this legislation will establish a volunteer advocate to represent animals in court who are the victims of cruelty. The aim of the bill is to reduce the number of dismissed cases, and help ensure punishments fit the severity of the violence committed.

**Personal testimony:**

The first domestic indoor rabbit I adopted came into The House Rabbit Connection, Inc care from a local Animal Control Officer. Izzy, a 4lb, indoor rabbit had been abused, starved, and neglected. Yes, a four pound bunny.

Daniel, another indoor bunny, was also removed by Animal Control and placed in a local shelter. Daniel, 4 lbs, had been allowed to be used as a play toy by the family dog. Daniel was missing part of one ear, and had an injured eye after being flung against the wall.

Reese, who just came into foster care through Our Companions was relinquished to a local vet in Berlin, CT. Reese has been neglected and by the time he got to the vet was severely emaciated requiring subcutaneous fluids to attempt to get him back on the path to health.

Hope, previously named Hopper, 3 lbs, had been neglected outdoors for months. When volunteers found her it was noted she had been sleeping on 2 to 3 inches of her own feces and was horribly matted. Her abdomen was so severely infected and ulcerated by the fecal bacteria that ate through her skin that she required debriding (removal of dead/infected skin) and several days at the veterinarians office to monitor her health.

Luckily these animals all survived, but too often there are innocent creatures that suffer abuse, torture, neglect, mutilation, and starvation at the hands of humans.

Animal cruelty, neglect and such is deplorable enough. But for those of us, like myself, that dedicate their life's work to saving and nurturing animals back to health cruelty, neglect etc is the epitome of evil.

I urge the members of the Judiciary Committee to look within your hearts and do the right thing. Animals should never experience pain and suffering at the hands of humans that lack respect and compassion for living and breathing creatures.

Please support HB 5344, **Desmond's Law**.

Let's finally turn the tide of legal injustice when it comes to cases of neglect and cruelty into one where the penalty fits the crime, restitution is paid, an animal abuse registry is implemented, and animals have a court appointed person to represent them in legal matters.

All creatures including animals should be allowed to live in peace and harmony and not fall victim to abuse, torture, or neglect by the hands of others.

Thank you,

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