

March 22, 2016

Joint Committee on Judiciary
Legislative Office Building, Room 2500
Hartford, Connecticut 06106



RE: Testimony of Animal Legal Defense Fund in Support of H.B. 5344, an Act Concerning Support for Animals that Are Neglected or Treated Cruelly (“Desmond’s Law”).

Via email: judgetestimony@cga.ct.gov

Dear Chair Coleman, Chair Tong, and Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

We write on behalf of the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) and its more than 200,000 members and supporters, many of whom reside in the State of Connecticut. For nearly four decades ALDF has worked within the legal system to protect the lives and advance the interests of animals. ALDF seeks especially to strengthen state anti-cruelty statutes and to secure stronger enforcement thereof, including by providing free legal assistance to prosecutors and law enforcement. ALDF likewise urges both criminal and civil courts to account for the best interests of animals in legal proceedings, for example by petitioning such courts to appoint qualified guardians ad litem to represent those interests.

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ALDF strongly supports H.B. 5344, which explicitly authorizes the courts of Connecticut to appoint a separate advocate to represent the interests of animals (and the interests of justice) in criminal proceedings affecting animals. While prosecutors and law enforcement throughout Connecticut work tirelessly to ensure enforcement of the law, we understand that these departments are often stretched thin and sometimes lack the resources to pursue cases involving animal victims to the fullest extent possible. H.B. 5344 would help to fill that enforcement gap, and Connecticut courts—at no additional cost to the State—would not be the first to appoint such advocates over animals. For example, state and federal courts in at least Florida, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington have appointed guardians and other representatives for animals in probate, civil, and criminal proceedings.

H.B. 5344 envisions that courts will appoint such advocates from a list that the Commissioner of Agriculture will provide. The Committee should therefore be aware that, in addition to students at the University of Connecticut School of Law, the law schools of both Quinnipiac and Yale

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 5344

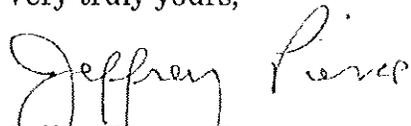
Universities sustain programs that generate high caliber law students and graduates with an interest in and exposure to animal law issues.

For example, Quinnipiac Law School offers a course in Animal Law taught by Professor Linda Meyer, a professor of criminal law and procedure and formerly a clerk to Justice Sandra Day O'Connor of the U.S. Supreme Court. Similarly, Yale Law School maintains an animal law Reading Group, taught by Douglas Kysar, a professor of tort law and environmental law. Also at Yale, the Student Animal Legal Defense Fund (SALDF), a student chapter of ALDF, provides law students with opportunities to engage issues related to animal law. Yale Law School and its SALDF chapter have hosted conferences specifically devoted to animal law, as well as treating animal issues at other conferences. Should Connecticut enact H.B. 5344, the State will benefit from a robust list of pro bono attorneys and interested law students eager to advocate on behalf of animals.

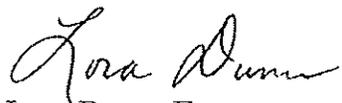
On a personal note, one of us (Jeff) lived, studied, and worked in Connecticut for several years in the 2000s, building lasting relationships throughout the State with family and friends who reside there. Having since joined an animal advocacy group and having witnessed firsthand the resource and institutional barriers to robust anti-cruelty enforcement, I, Jeff, am pleased to know that the Constitution State that I gladly called home may soon draw upon the vast resources of its citizen advocates in shoring up badly needed protections for animals.

ALDF urges the Committee to favorably report H.B. 5344.

Very truly yours,



Jeffrey Pierce, Esq.
Legislative Counsel



Lora Dunn, Esq.
Interim Director and Staff Attorney, Criminal Justice Program