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Good morning Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis and members of the Environment Committee. I am here to testify in support of HB 5147, AN ACT INCREASING THE MAXIMUM PENALTY FOR PERSONS CONVICTED OF SUBSEQUENT OFFENSES OF MALICIOUS AND INTENTIONAL ANIMAL CRUELTY.

In Connecticut we have long recognized that crimes of animal cruelty are not only horrific acts in themselves, but they are often precursors to violent crimes against people (especially against children). In 2011 the General Assembly enacted a law that required cross reporting of animal cruelty and child abuse and that law was strengthened in 2014.

Recently the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has launched a national database on crimes of animal cruelty. These acts are now counted alongside felony crimes like arson, burglary, assault, and homicide in the FBI's expansive criminal database. This year, the Bureau's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) began collecting detailed data from participating law enforcement agencies on acts of animal cruelty. Before this year, crimes involving animals were lumped into an "All Other Offenses" category.

In light of the FBI's action, I believe that increasing the penalty for repeated instances of serious forms of animal cruelty is appropriate. Massachusetts also recently enacted enhanced penalties for animal cruelty and made veterinarians mandatory reporters of animal abuse.

Current law in Connecticut makes this crime a class D felony. This bill would leave that in place for first offenders but it would make subsequent offenses a class C felony. This reflects the bipartisan compromise in SB 361 as amended by LCO 7389 that passed the State Senate in 2015 but was not taken up by the House. I would strongly encourage the committee to pass this sensible legislation.