



Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, Members of the Environment Committee,

We represent the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association, which includes the majority of Connecticut-licensed veterinarians. Our members have dedicated their professional lives to improving the health and welfare of animals. While we acknowledge that the intention of SB 228 is to better protect animals, we have some serious concerns.

Expanding damages for the loss of companionship to owners of companion animals in extreme circumstances of intentional cruelty can have unintended consequences. While most don't consider pets to be mere "property," both courts and legislators must carefully examine the policy consequences of expanding liability beyond a pet's intrinsic property value.

Increasing monetary damages in these cases will result in an eventual expansion of "loss of companionship" claims, which will increase the numbers of such lawsuits, and cause malpractice insurance rates for veterinarians and other animal service providers to rise. These increased costs will inevitably be passed on to consumers in the form of higher fees for service, leading many pet owners to minimize or avoid necessary care. This will be especially so for pet owners of modest means., indeed most working people.

Expanded damages will hurt animals through both increased costs and decreased demand for veterinary services. Many consumers budget a certain amount for their pet's medical care, but no more. If prices rise, pet owners are less likely to visit the veterinarian and will decline some necessary preventive measures when doing so. The increased potential for lawsuits will also result in a trend to the practice of "defensive medicine" as veterinarians become more concerned with lawsuits, also increasing veterinary expenses.

There are public health consequences to reduction in the delivery of veterinary services. Control of Rabies and other zoonotic diseases through regular evaluation and vaccination, is an important function of veterinary practice. There are already too few animals having the legally required Rabies immunization, to risk further reduction in that intervention. Veterinarians also assist communities in pet population control and help limit production of unwanted offspring abandoned in community shelters. Cost increases will only add to that burden. Animal control officers statewide will confirm both of these concerns.

While the intention of SB 228 may be to more aggressively discourage cruel treatment of animals, better enforcement of existing cruelty statutes and harsher criminal penalties for those who engage in such behavior is the appropriate remedy, and the CVMA strongly supports such measures. Thank you.

Very respectfully,

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Co-Chairs

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