



State of Connecticut

SENATE

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Sen. Coleman, Rep. Tong, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

Please consider this testimony in support of **SB 415: An Act Prohibiting Accelerated Rehabilitation In The Case of Animal Abuse.**

In the last five years, Connecticut has seen some terrible cases of intentional animal abuse.

In 2011, four alpacas in my district were stabbed to death on a farm in Ivoryton. Also in 2011, a former Branford resident beat, starved, and kicked his dog for months, eventually strangling him. In December 2014 in Westbrook, a woman left her horse -- so weak and thin he could not get up after a fall -- on the floor for at least twenty-four hours until town residents filed a complaint. And in January 2016, a Hartford man fought with his girlfriend and then nearly beat her cat to death, later hanging it from a closet door.

In each and every one of these cases, the defendants received or are eligible for Accelerated Rehabilitation (AR). Under statute, they pay a fee, are under observation by the court for a prescribed period of time, and if they do not violate the judges' orders, they are set free, and their records wiped clean.

Currently, when AR is awarded to a defendant, there is no distinction made between minor neglect and intentional, malicious abuse. While it may be appropriate to award AR to those who commit minor acts of neglect or hoarding, it is not appropriate for those who deliberately torture or kill an animal.

Therefore, I would like to recommend the following change in language to the proposed bill, to give judges more flexibility:

For SB 415, instead of:
or (10) to any person charged with a violation of section 53-247.
I propose this substitute:
or (10) to any person charged with a violation of section 53-247(b).

This would identify those individuals that may be likely to commit abuse in the future. At present, should these defendants apply for future employment serving animals, children, the elderly, or any vulnerable population, potential employers will see no record of a pattern of abuse. This is wrong. Approving this bill with the substitute language will change that.

As the Connecticut legislature continues to focus on strengthening domestic violence statutes and protections, we must recognize the relationship between animal cruelty and domestic violence, and document that link for all concerned. Keeping records of incidences of animal abuse and domestic violence allows patterns to emerge, promotes appropriate assistance to the abuser, and appropriate protections to children, partners, and the elderly, as well as animals themselves.

We must do better for these animals and the families who love them. We must do better to prevent future acts of abuse, by keeping those who commit harm away from our most vulnerable citizens. In Connecticut, there should be no free ride for abuse.

I thank you for your consideration of **SB 415**.