

Judiciary Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-523

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING AN ANIMAL ABUSE REGISTRY.

Vote Date: 4/4/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/26/2018

File No.: 618

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Judiciary Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Senator Kevin Witkos raised this bill so that Connecticut can be a national leader in the protection of animals and prevention of crime. He based the bill on Tennessee's statewide registry model.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

Changes the effective date from October 1, 2018 to January 1, 2019

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Office of the Chief Public Defender (OCPD), Deborah Del Prete Sullivan, Legal Counsel:

Opposes the bill. Registries have not been proven to reduce recidivism and have created additional consequences for the offenders upon reentry including difficulty in obtaining housing and employment. There is no differentiation on the registry regarding an individual's threat to public safety; all of the offenders are grouped together which could lead to the public making generalized assumptions about anyone on the list. The OCPD believes there is no conclusive evidence that registries reduce crime and do not negatively impact the offenders who are attempting to successfully reintegrate into society.

State of Connecticut, Judicial Branch, External Affairs Division:

The branch has fiscal concerns with the bill as proposed. The Judicial Branch would need to supply the relevant data to the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) which would necessitate computer changes to be able to flag the offense requiring registration and to disseminate conviction information to the new DESPP registry. This will create a new burden for the understaffed Clerk's offices. An additional staffing concern is the

requirement that a “description of the offense” be included on the registry as this entails more work for clerks, court reporters and judges. If implemented, the branch asks that the implementation date be pushed to July 1, 2019 to give them time to make the necessary changes.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

State Senator Kevin D. Witkos, 8th District:

Proposed and supports the bill. By establishing an animal abuse registry, the bill would keep people who have abused animals from being able to adopt or in any way care for an animal. An additional benefit would be the ability to track individuals who might currently or in the future develop aggressive/violent behavior toward humans. He cited one study that showed that 65% of animal abusers have also been arrested for battery against a person. Other studies have shown a connection between murderers who as teens tortured animals. Neglecting an animal can indicate issues with household stress and/or mental illness. For these reasons, the FBI now collects data for animal cruelty. By establishing an animal abuse registry, Connecticut can help keep animals safe and perhaps identify people at risk of committing additional crimes and other acts of violence and intervening to prevent such acts from occurring.

He included details about how the Tennessee system is being implemented and recommends Connecticut adopting the same structure.

Connecticut Votes for Animals, Susan B. Linker, Board Member:

Supports the bill but notes that according to the Judicial Branch, the vast majority of animal abuse charges were dismissed or nolle prosequi between 2005 through 2015 so the registry would not accurately reflect the number of people who have perpetrated acts of cruelty against animals.

Jennifer Brown, Shelton, CT:

Supports the bill. She stated that 46% of convicted multiple murderers and all seven of the boys who were involved in the school shootings that took place across America between 1997 and 2001 admitted to having committed acts of animal torture as adolescents. During her years working in the domestic violence and childhood trauma fields, Ms. Brown heard many stories from her clients about abusers who threatened to and/or actually did hurt or kill the family pet as a way to control their wives or children through fear and intimidation.

Jacqueline Mickiewicz, Coordinator of an equine therapy program for veterans suffering from PTSD:

Supports the bill and noted that horses and other domesticated animals are also abused and should be curbed.

Jennifer Bird, Southington, CT:

Supports the bill because she believes that people who abuse animals also commit many other criminal offenses. This bill will help keep communities safe from them.

Jennifer Crago, Collinsville, CT:

Supports the bill. She states that this bill will save animal rescue organizations time and money because they will have easy access to the registry to know if a potential adopter has an animal abuse history.

Chris Olson:

Supports the bill. Mr. Olson believes that an animal abuse registry could be used as a tool to identify the warning signs of potential violence against humans and help these people get help before their criminal behavior escalates.

Natasha Barry, Shelton, CT:

Supports the bill. She shared the case of Desmond, a dog that was re-adopted from the local shelter by a man from Branford who then abused and killed it. She believes the registry would prevent someone like him from being able to adopt a pet by ending accelerated rehabilitation. She also believes the registry would help flag people who might go on to abuse humans. Knowing that the registry exists might deter an individual from abusing an animal in the first place.

Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates, Christine Kiernan, Co-founder:

Supports the bill. Ms. Kiernan expressed appreciation that the animal abuse registry would keep a defendant's name on the record even if they receive accelerated rehabilitation. She believes the registry will save the lives of animals and humans. She states that her organization will be sure the public is educated about the registry if and when it goes into effect. The registry will let individuals and animal focused agencies/ businesses know if an individual has a propensity toward violence by having access to it.

Patricia Trisko:

Supports the bill. Ms. Trisko has rescued many animals and states that ones who have been abused are very hard to place in a new home. She noted that there is often a link between animal abuse and those who commit violence against humans and pointed out that the Parkland shooter was an animal abuser. The bill would also help shelters know whether someone should be allowed to adopt an animal.

Susan King, Barkhamsted, CT:

Supports the bill. She shared the story of a man in Waterbury who purchased a dog for his daughter and then severely abused it, breaking many bones. She is opposed to accelerated rehabilitation for animal abusers in light of the fact that they often go on to hurt humans.

Linda Pleva:

Supports the bill. Ms. Pleva has been volunteering at an animal rescue organization for several years. Many animals that end up in shelters have been previously abused. It is imperative to know that such an animal will not end up in the home of an animal abuser because another abuse incident could trigger a defensive response that would then lead to the animal having to be euthanized.

Lexi's Angels, Stacey Christoforides, Co-founder:

Supports the bill. It will assist rescues when approving applications for adopting because they only have to go to the site to check to see if a person has a record for abusing animals. It will save them time and money.

The following individuals submitted brief testimony in support of the bill, noting that many individuals who abuse animals are abusing or will potentially abuse humans:

- Suzanne Barkyoumb, West Granby, CT
- Cindy Casper, Bridgeport, CT
- Noreen Favreau, East Haddam, CT
- Doreen Miller, Wolcott, CT
- Amy Mortensen, Stratford, CT
- Liz Ritchie

The following individuals submitted brief testimony in support of the bill:

- Laura Amorando, Stratford, CT
- Jennifer Amrose, Canton, CT
- Silvana Apicella, West Haven, CT
- Tracey Backman, Avon, CT
- Mimi Beaulieu, New Haven, CT
- Brenda Bettcher, Farmington, CT
- Rachel Boni, Riverton, CT
- Cindy Burkard
- Diane Carangelo, Naugatuck, CT
- Cathy Cenatiempo, Norwalk, CT
- Priscilla Clark, Middletown, CT
- Sherry Courtemanche, Barkhamsted, CT
- Martha Kirkland Cuthbert, Southbury, CT
- Jim Dexter
- Cindy Dezi, New Hartford, CT
- Judy DeFillippi, Bristol, CT
- Jeannine Derouin
- Elizabeth Dobos
- Bill Edwin, Canton, CT
- Donna Ellsmore, Norfolk, CT
- Jean M. Ferrara
- Charles Fitch
- Christine Fothergill
- Theresa Franconi, New Hartford, CT
- Gisele Giguere
- For the Love of Jack, Inc., Sherrie Gioia, President
- Deanna Grant, Stratford, CT
- Della Greenwood
- Verilee Herpich, Goshen, CT
- Traci Houde, Northford, CT
- Karen Hunter, New Fairfield, CT
- Lucy Jennison, New Hartford, CT
- Nicki Jud
- Rachel Kinsman, Stratford, CT
- Sharon Liljedahl
- Gina Magennis, Canton, CT

- Linda Martin, New Hartford, CT
- Patti Maulucci, Canton, CT
- Mary McCarthy, Barkhamsted, CT
- Martha Moak, Winsted, CT
- Garry Pastore, Torrington, CT
- Marian Pastore, Torrington, CT
- Stefanie Pfann, Stratford, CT
- Deborah Redman, Bethlehem, CT
- Julie Reed, Waterbury, CT
- Linda Richard, Barkhamsted, CT
- Lori Russo, New Milford, CT
- Elizabeth Saintjohn
- Patti Scanlon, Simsbury, CT
- Richard Stanley
- Sue Therrien, Volunteer with a rescue organization, Collinsville, CT
- Pamela Tomer
- Michael J, Uccello, Canton, CT
- Officer Judy Umstead, Woodbury, CT
- Susan Valente
- Michelle Walden, Wolcott, CT
- JeanAnn Ward, Weatogue, CT
- Dahkotch Whitefox
- Karen M. Williams, New Fairfield, CT
- Valerie Woodruff, Vernon, CT
- W. David Zitzkat, New Hartford, CT
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NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (CCDLA), Jennifer N. Mello, Board Member:

Opposes the bill for three reasons: (1) Online registries do not assess actual risk and have not been proven to protect the public; (2) Registries can create barriers to an offender's ability to reintegrate into society by making it more difficult to gain employment, housing and social support; and (3) Online registries cost the state money to create and maintain. Additionally, registries are often challenged on the basis of violating the registrants' civil liberties and the state would have to pay for the legal fees to fight these challenges.

Thomas J. Ryan, Torrington, CT:

Opposes the bill. He states that those convicted of crimes against animals are already listed on the public record. This bill would only serve to provide the neighbors of offenders with a prejudicial outlook. He states that someone who has abused an animal is not of high risk to the humans in their neighborhood and is unlikely to abuse someone else's pet. He wonders if juveniles would be included on this list.

Cheryl McMurray, Wolcott, CT:

Opposes the bill.

Reported by: Tamara Morris

Date: May 3, 2018